

Screen

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Silent Light and the world of emotion

Tears, melodrama and 'heterosensibility'

A historical ontology of the cinematic image

Detection, location and history in Uchida Tomu

Spectacular television and landscape

The film festivals dossier

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editorial

Screen

Gilmorehill Centre
University of Glasgow
Glasgow G12 8QQ
screen@arts.gla.ac.uk

internet sites:

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issue editor

Karen Lury

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Cornelio Wall Fehr in *Silent Light*
(Carlos Reygadas, No Dream Cinema
and Mataraya Producciones, 2007).
Image from Palisades Tartan Video
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Betraying oneself: *Silent Light* and the world of emotion

JONATHAN FOLTZ

In a fragment of his *Pensées*, Blaise Pascal reflects on the moral dangers of theatrical representation. According to Pascal, theatre's power, and its threat, lies in the fact that it elicits beautiful emotions which, in convincing us of their magnificence, blind us to their solipsistic nature. The sympathy, compassion or even love that we feel towards the characters on the stage, Pascal hazards, may in fact support an imperious egoism, our 'self-love'. The theatre, he says,

represents passions so naturally and delicately that it arouses and engenders them in our heart, especially that of love; above all when it is represented as very chaste and virtuous. For the more innocent it seems to innocent souls, the more liable they are to be touched by it; its violence appeals to our self-love, which at once conceives the desire to produce the same effects which we see so well represented. At the same time our conscience is conditioned by the irreproachable sentiments to be seen there, which remove the fear of pure souls, who imagine that purity is not offended by loving with a love which seems to them so prudent.¹

¹ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (New York, NY: Penguin Classics, 1966), p. 259.

We want to believe that something like love is the ideal expression of what art might communicate to its audience. But instead of such nourishing communication, Pascal fears, the spectatorial nature of the theatre provides only an occasion for self-confirmation. What is troubling about spectatorship, from this view, is its failure to reconcile us to a world of meaningful attachment, even as it promises just such a formal realignment of the self. Theatre – and, we might add, film – may aspire to affirm our

2 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (New York, NY: Continuum, 2004), p. 219.

3 This is further implied by Pascal's critique of what he calls 'natural style': 'When some passion or effect is described in a natural style, we find within ourselves the truth of what we hear, without knowing it was there. We are consequently inclined to like the person who made us feel it, for he has shown us not his wealth but our own.' Pascal, *Pensées*, p. 240.

4 This is true of reviews both positive – Roger Ebert, 'Silent Light', *Chicago Sun-Times*, 20 March 2009, p. B4; Manohla Dargis, 'Silent Light', *New York Times*, 24 September 2008, p. E1 – and fundamentally negative – Scott Foundas, 'Silent Light', *Variety*, 28 May–3 June 2007, p. 24; Owen Gleiberman, 'Silent Light', *Entertainment Weekly*, 23 January 2009, p. 49.

5 Seen from the psychoanalytic perspective most readily available to film criticism, we could take Christian Metz's formulation as a restatement of Pascal, when he observes that 'the spectator identifies with himself'. Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster and Alfred Guzzetti (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 49.

contact with the world or to provoke what Adorno calls a 'subjective comportment in which objectivity leaves its imprint',² but the Pascalian critique of aesthetics contends that theatrical art only exacerbates our egoism, prompting us to rescript the world, and other people, in the exalted image of our own sentiments.³ Pascal's position may seem uncomfortably moralistic, even anti-aesthetic, but it is worth considering in less polemical terms some possible consequences of art's subjective confusions.

A version of Pascal's aesthetic scepticism emerges, I would suggest, in Carlos Reygadas's 2007 film *Stellet Licht/Silent Light*, which employs theological tropes in order to indicate not a criticism of the insufficiency of worldly desire but sublime parallels for the intensities of love, which must transcend the self if they are to justify the consequences of their enjoyment. While the film's imperatives are ultimately secular, it nonetheless draws upon religious thinking in order to express a dissatisfaction with the aesthetic norms of spectatorship, encouraging us to be disappointed by the customary forms of identity and identification which are the staple of romance. Most reviewers of the film have noted that *Silent Light* owes a significant debt to Carl Dreyer's *Ordet* (1955), from which it borrows its climactic scene of resurrection.⁴ The comparison is helpful, though it mainly reveals how *little* the two films resemble each other. For while Dreyer's film relies on a rhythm of restrained formalism to make questions of faith viscerally present in its dazzling final sequence, *Silent Light* evokes the Kierkegaardian atmosphere of Dreyer's mysterious Protestant drama while putting it in the service of an essentially romantic study of love and forgiveness, where the question concerns not a choice between orders of the human and the divine but the impossibility of a man's choice between two women. Insofar as the film's theological context evinces a structural uncertainty about the fundamental theatricality of emotion, Reygadas's film seeks to maintain a vision of the world in which a depiction of love is possible – possible, that is, without at the same time falling prey to the identificatory lures to which Pascal refers (figures 1 and 2).⁵ Approached in this way, we might say that the primary aesthetic problem for Reygadas's film is that of *fidelity*: it strives to depict the world in a way that remains true, not just to its appearance but to the fragility of this appearance in the face of the consuming distortions of our impassioned vision. *Silent Light* approaches this thematic concern with romance through an exemplary reflection on the nature of spectatorship and the precarious role of emotion in its construction. The film's strategy, as I read it, is to emphasize this emotive blindness in the correspondence between dramatic embodiment and the depsychologized space of pictorial composition. In *Silent Light* we learn to decipher the passion of the characters just as much from their emblematic disposition in space, and their doubling in the natural world, as from the vivid expressions on their faces. In this way the film

Fig. 1. Carl Dreyer's *Ordet* (1955).
Image from Criterion Collection.



Fig. 2. Carlos Reygadas's *Silent Light* (No Dream Cinema and Matarraya Producciones, 2007).
Image from Palisades Tartan Video Collection.



⁶ I would link the ambitions of Reygadas's film to those analyzed in Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Forms of Being: Cinema, Aesthetics, Subjectivity* (London: British Film Institute, 2004), pp. 8–9, where the authors find 'connections both to the human and to the non-human that are to the side of, or "before" more officially sanctioned connections that confirm such identities as husband, or mother, or soldier. Immanent in every subject is its similitudes with other subjects (and other objects) – similitudes... that "shine" into visibility when those others intersect with the subject's spatial or temporal trajectories.'

⁷ Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier*, p. 15.

obliges us to adopt formal or aesthetic readings in lieu of psychological identifications. Such identifications may be inescapable, especially given the nature of romantic plots. Yet by insisting on a style of visual depersonalization, *Silent Light* strives to remain faithful to the troubling externality of emotions, which define our identity while rendering it strangely inconsequential.⁶

Christian Metz has written that the analysis of film requires us to bracket our love for it, while recalling this love from a distance.⁷ It seems we cannot see a film clearly when we are in its thrall, though we will have lost something essential about the experience of film if we overlook the operations that invite our misperceptions. *Silent Light* explores this affective restlessness in remarkably sustained ways; although, in pushing its viewers towards a reevaluation of their affective investment in its narrative world, the film is not interested in fostering a critical subjectivity. Rather, the film's self-reflexivity allows us to see that the experience of

8 For a related study of love and photography in the work of Roland Barthes, see Eduardo Cadava and Paola Cortés-Rocca, 'Notes on love and photography', *October*, no. 116 (2006), pp. 3–34.

9 Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: the Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 47.

10 This also doubtless sheds light on Darwin's decision, in his book on emotional expression, to include photographs of infants crying instead of the trained actors he employs elsewhere. The infant, who is tempted neither to embellish nor restrain its frequent emotional outbursts, gives us, as it were, an image of unadulterated suffering. See Charles Darwin, *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals* (New York, NY: D. Appleton, 1873), p. 13.

love, like the experience of the cinema, violates the forms of identity it is often thought to confirm.⁸

There is perhaps no more problematic, and no more conventional, mode of picturing emotional life than the display of tears. Since tears by their nature distort the visible field, cinematic representations of crying often invite starkly divergent affective responses. For while the very intimacy of the act of crying inspires pity or sympathy, such sentimentality is always implicitly undermined by the stubborn detachment of the camera, which displays moments of great emotional confusion with unflinching clarity. Cinematic scenes of crying thus invite identification as well as something mysteriously less than identification, confirming Kracauer's remark that in film the human face appears to us 'before the desires and emotions to which it refers have been completely defined, thus tempting us to get lost in its puzzling indeterminacy'.⁹ The images we receive of the actor's face – flushed or pale, convulsive, weeping, sniffing – indicate to us something of the intensity of the character's emotion, but in this act of recognition or sympathy the visceral materiality of the actor's face has been subtly subtracted, translated into an essentially imaginative idiom. The emotions felt by the audience, in turn, must repair the gap implied by what cannot be shown, but such responses are marked by a sense of their artificiality. (Perhaps this is why crying during films can accord such pleasure: our sympathetic tears are bathed in the fantasy that all our troubles are as imaginary, or as capable of exposition, as those viewed on screen.)

Precisely because the display of tears treads so precariously the line between authenticity and performance, it is often considered a form of virtuosic acting to make the shedding of tears seem convincing.¹⁰ The skilled performer can conjure their tears from within, while a more inexperienced actor may have to rely on the artificial tears administered by eyedropper (or its recent cousin, the digital tear added in postproduction). For these reasons, we might say, scenes of crying do more than give us putative access to the emotional lives of the characters; they also speak to the larger aesthetic commitments of the film at hand. Tears can be believable or unbelievable, disturbingly uncontrolled or achingly false, and our ability to arrive at these judgments gives us crucial narrative information (whether he or she is lying, and so on), but also concretizes, or dissolves, the very consistency of the world which is presented to us on the screen.

The fact that the spectacle of tears can never be a self-evident marker of dramatic emotion has important consequences for any reading of *Silent Light*. Very early in the film we find the protagonist, Johan (Cornelio Wall Fehr), sitting alone at the breakfast table after his family has left on a series of errands. Framed in a medium shot from the end of the table, Johan seems lost in thought as he plays disinterestedly with a spoon. Then, in a carefully orchestrated series of physical gestures and camera movement,

Johan pushes the spoon out of reach as the camera starts to track forward; as we move towards a near-closeup, Johan begins, inexplicably, to cry. The coordination of these movements clearly establishes a sense of visual reciprocity between camera and performance: as we approach Johan with the measured and deliberate speed of the track shot we are also introduced to a greater intimacy with Johan's inner turmoil, to which his tears would appear to testify. The movement of the camera seems in this way to express a form of narrative desire, not only to get closer to Johan but to get imaginatively inside of him – a trajectory which is facilitated by the performance of weeping and, ideally, completed by the viewer (figures 3–6).

And yet, precisely by manifesting the ideal movement of identification Reygadas also ironizes it, making the compensatory pleasure of such identification emphatically unavailable. Primarily this is because the scene's organization within the film means the audience has not yet been given the context to understand Johan's tears. We will later discover that Johan has been involved in a prolonged affair with a woman named Marianne, and that his inability to reconcile his love for her with his sense of religious and familial duty has left him in a shambles. But this belated knowledge can only imperfectly add retrospective meaning to the opening scene of Johan's tears. For while the movement of the camera suggests a heightened narrative proximity to Johan's emotions, the very illegibility of his behaviour – our inability to place it within a narrative context – preserves a distance that is only rearticulated by the camera's slow, almost intrusive, progress forward.

This structural distancing is reinforced by Reygadas's treatment of performance and his use of non-actors. As Reygadas has repeatedly stressed in interviews, and as nearly every review of the film has remarked upon, the film's main characters are performed by members of the Mennonite community (though not all of them from the same community in Mexico where the film takes place). A significant part of the film's drama, then, comes from the very fact of its production, which was contentious among the Mennonites and is often invoked to bolster the sense of the film's authenticity, especially in its use of religious themes.¹¹ I would argue, however, that a much more significant consequence of the use of non-actors is that it allows Reygadas to ironize their performances, turning them into compositional elements rather than dramatically expressive figures. In this sense, Reygadas's use of non-actors may be influenced by the protocols of Bresson, though in *Silent Light* the choice carries thematic meanings that clearly distinguish it from Bresson's conceptualizations. For Bresson,

Your models, pitched into the action of your film, will get used to the gestures they have repeated twenty times. The words they have learned with their lips will find, *without their minds taking part in this*, the inflections and the lilt proper to their true natures. A way of recovering the automatism of real life.¹²

11 'Only a non-actor can represent the kind of characters I have', comments Reygadas in an interview. 'The people are Germanic and Protestant; they are visually homogenous and clean. They take the Bible literally, to take dominion over the land and propagate.' Karin Louisa Badt, 'Silent Light; or, absolute miracle: an interview with Carlos Reygadas at Cannes 2007', *Bright Lights Film Journal*, no. 57 (2007).

12 Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematographer*, trans. Jonathan Griffin (Los Angeles, CA: Green Integer, 1997), p. 69.



Figs 3–6. Johan's tears. Images from Palisades Tartan Video.

13 One could also contrast the performances in *Silent Light* to Deleuze's 'mutant characters': 'what happens to them does not belong to them and only half-concerns them... [They are] "actor-mediums", capable of seeing and showing rather than acting.' Deleuze, *Cinema 2: the Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), pp. 19-20. Johan, by contrast, is not a canny participant in the disclosures which his performative incapacities make uniquely visible. He shows his world to us in effect without seeing it.

For Reygadas, the situation is pointedly different. Though he uses non-actors in a manner that explicitly recalls Bresson's theories, Reygadas plays upon their inability to enact skilfully the dramatic emotions they are meant to embody. Johan's tears in the opening scene seem designed to be essentially incomprehensible, for us as well as for Wall Fehr, who performs the role. Rather than stress the automaticity of emotion repressed as a gestural routine, Reygadas emphasizes the artificial incapacity of the actor, who performs his sadness but does not convincingly embody it. Instead, what we are shown is a prolonged and uncanny pantomime of exaggerated snivels and spasms that insist upon the uneasy spectacle of the actor's convulsive and animalized face rather than his emotive interiority. The impersonality of the scene is heightened by the sounds of moaning cattle and shrieking wildlife that saturate the ambience of the scene. Johan's cries and grunts echo and restage a primeval helplessness, but our perception of this correspondence is predicated on the gap between emotion and performance that renders Johan's tears essentially incomprehensible as anything other than a strangely material and creaturely performance.¹³

The externality of our perspective, however, does not necessarily mean that we are unconcerned with the character of Johan, or that the film wishes to belittle his emotional struggle. On the contrary, the distancing effects in the opening scene offer a formal way for the film to address the extremity of its thematic content. This is clarified in a later scene between Johan and his father, in which Johan confesses his affair and asks for advice. The father responds by suggesting that Johan's desire is 'the work of the Enemy', while Johan insists that 'it's God's doing'. By positing the two opposed theological explanations for Johan's desire, the film suggests that in either case Johan is merely a vessel for the work of larger forces he cannot control. This 'unknown' or 'inexplicable' desire, as it is alternately called by the father, renders Johan unable to choose either of the two women, while leaving him responsible for his wife's pain and her eventual death from a 'severe attack of the heart'. This dramatic ambivalence is literalized in the helpless figure of the unskilled actor, going through the motions of his performance while being visibly under the sway of an outside force. In this sense, Reygadas's directorial presence plays a central though invisible role as the narrative analogue to the divine forces that animate Johan even as they seem to tear him apart. The opening scene of Johan's tears, then, allegorizes a much more persistent formal gesture in the film, for it forces us to acknowledge the insufficiency of characterological readings. Such stylistic strategies lend tacit support to Johan's sense that he is not in control of his love, or that a true, and implicitly divine, love might be defined by this lack of control. (That such an ideal of amatory passivity can only come with the help of extreme directorial wilfulness, however, remains one of those inescapable ironies.)

Throughout the film, the dissipation of character into composition, image and landscape compulsively restages this insoluble ethical bind.

Especially frequent are long-take sequence shots that seem at first to be shown from Johan's perspective but which eventually reveal themselves to be 'third-person' depictions in which Johan appears as a figure in the frame (such as the shot of Johan driving to the car mechanics'). Even more complicated is the winter scene in which the camera begins behind Johan and his father, moves to replace their perspective, and turns full-circle before restoring them as framed subjects. Meanwhile, the camera's longing gaze at the landscape of snow-covered furrows reflects an insistent instability in the film's visual schema, which oscillates erratically between subjective and objective dispositions. This does not signal the more familiar attempt to convey a character's subjectivity through a stylized manipulation of the camera, but rather indicates the film's aspiration to replace interiority with a grammar of visual depersonalization in a way that mirrors the externality of emotion itself. The most resonant image of this process is the tear itself; or, rather, the way in which tears both express and deform identity. It is in this mode that we see Johan driving with his family following a trip to a swimming hole. Almost nothing is visible in the frame except a small fragment of his cheek and jaw, which show the faint outline of a flow of tears – the rest of his face is consumed by darkness (figure 7). In this instance, we see his tears precisely in place of himself. The dislocation of the subject in the frame may thus be taken to indicate that impassioned suffering takes place as an eclipse of identity, on the threshold of being and nonbeing, which the camera transcribes in the relation of darkness and light. We only truly apprehend the drama, in other words, if we lose sight of its principal agents in the midst of their embodied negation.

There is idealism as well as distrust in the film's formal reorganization of psychological space. The visual gestures of depersonalization, as I have suggested, evoke the uncontrollability of sentiment, but they also console us with the fact that our affective distance from Johan allows us to draw divergent conclusions about the moral or ethical dilemma posed by his affair. How can Johan believe his love to be pure when he so clearly uses this ostensible purity as a licence for his own erotic pursuits? When the objects of his love are so evidently hurt by his actions? When, despite his sense of being subject to external forces, he is manifestly enjoying himself (as he does when he breaks into song)? What, in fact, is the ethical relation of love to enjoyment? How do we reconcile the noble sentiments which cause us to recognize and care for another with the pleasure we extract from this intimacy? And what is the relation of such romantic gratification to what we might call aesthetic pleasure? These, I would suggest, are the questions that animate *Silent Light*, informing its attempt to frustrate the possibility of identification, even as it disables the insulations of a detached spectatorship. The film undertakes this work in two ways: by thematizing the passivity of both performance and viewership, and by testing the affective distortions of visual pleasure in its own charged representation of physical landscapes. In a film as unapologetically beautiful as *Silent Light*, so defiantly committed to evoking the grandeur

Fig. 7. Johan's dark tears. Image from Palisades Tartan Video.



and sublimity of nature, such sumptuous pictorialism plays a double role – at once inviting and warding off our investments in what we see.

The anxiety that representations of love are doomed by the implicit narcissism of spectatorship is registered by two emblematic scenes in the film. In the first, Johan visits his friend Zacarias before an assignation with Marianne. The scene begins with the two friends in seemingly earnest conversation: Zacarias, for example, observes to Johan, ‘A powerful thing’s come over you. You’ve found your natural woman. Very few know what that means. You’ll have to carry on. ... If that is your destiny, then you’ll have to be brave.’ ‘A brave man makes destiny with what he’s got’, Johan responds. ‘My woman is called Esther, Zacarias.’ This reflective discussion is broken off as the film verges into the territory of lusty musical performance. The abruptness of the tonal shift makes us doubt the sincerity of Johan’s protestations, but it also transfers this doubt onto the act of viewing itself by having Johan sing directly into the camera.

Zacarias: It’s only for you to decide, but be careful not to betray yourself.

Johan: It’s true that Marianne is a better woman for me. At least that’s my feeling.

Zacarias: And that feeling may be founded in something sacred, even if we don’t understand it.

Country Roland’s version of ‘No Volveré’ begins to play on the radio, and Johan starts to sing along

Johan: Turn that thing up!

Zacarias: The swine’s on for a good lay, huh?

Johan: Yeah!

He continues singing as he gets into his truck, driving circles around Zacarias before leaving. (Figures 8–11)

The suddenness of the pivot from the sacred to the profane definitively portrays Johan as an unreliable narrator of his feelings, blind to their

14 The chorus to the song, especially, seems to comment on the film. The lyrics in English read: 'No... I won't come back / I swear to you before God / I tell you crying with rage / I won't come back / No... I won't stop / Until I see that my tears have made / A stream of flooded oblivion / Where I will drown your memory.' All of Johan's tears, however, do not seem to help him relinquish his relationship to Marianne.

contradictory irony. This is in part because his vulgar desire for 'a good lay' is shown to belie, but also to parody, the 'powerful thing' that has ostensibly come over him. The song, too, represents an external force to which Johan submits, but we are made to see the ways in which this pose of passivity allows Johan certain consolations, ratifying his desires while relieving him of the painful reflection on the hurt his actions have caused. The scene emphasizes this by extending the time of his performance until it borders on excess. The song on his lips serves as a vehicle for Johan's erotic expectations and unaccountable joy, but this catharsis is undercut both by the actual content of the lyrics (which describe a lover's resolve not to return to his beloved, whose memory he will drown in tears), and by the circularity of Johan's movement in the car, which approximates the circularity of autoerotic fantasy.¹⁴ Staring directly into the camera (which takes the place of Zacarias until the end of the shot when he is shown in the left of the frame), Johan embodies the narcissism which his performance would like to forget. Furthermore, the emphatic centrality of the camera as the recipient of his address suggests that our viewing is complicit with the vanity of his disregard. This is in part because we are given vicarious access to Johan's romance in the same way that Johan pretends to receive the song passively from the radio, playing upon the impersonality of mass culture to provide us with pleasures we can always ascribe to another once we have left the theatre.

The ostentatious nature of Johan's performance in this scene might also be taken as a warning of sorts, akin to Zacarias's advice that Johan 'be careful not to betray [him]self'. From the lips of Zacarias, the dutiful and enabling friend, the instruction for Johan to remain faithful to himself, to not betray the sacred mystery of his love for Marianne, all but ensures the continuing betrayal of his wife. Either Johan betrays Esther or he is unfaithful to his feelings – the one certainty in the film is betrayal. Indeed, in the narrative we are pointedly deprived of just this illusion of choice, since – as we find out in this scene – we have entered the story long after the affair has begun. The real drama of the film, then, is not whether it is justified to betray one's wife (the urgency of love makes betrayal, either of oneself or of others, inevitable) but whether it is possible to bring such destructive desire to an end. Because the intelligibility of this plot depends on our ability to read the fluctuations of sincerity and abandon in Johan's character, in moving from his solitary tears to his boisterous song we are jolted by the reminder that our prior assumptions about him have been woefully incomplete, even as we become restless with the burden of reconciling all of Johan's divergent impulses into a psychological whole. I have suggested that something of this formal restlessness is already inscribed in that early scene, but here we are prompted more concretely to see how the film's ironized representational structures are supported by our understanding of Johan's own inconstancy. That is, by framing our perception of the film's amorous tragedy within scenes of contrasting self-presentation (in tears or in song), we are obliged to connect the opacity of



Figs 8–11. Johan's song. Images from Palisades Tartan Video.

such performative gestures to the ethical problems signaled in the narrative.

In spite of his attempt to honour the seriousness of his ethical dilemma, Johan gives himself away in his incongruous enjoyment of Country Roland's song, the lyrics of which perversely turn his renunciative pose into an anthem of illicit pleasure. If this performance doubles as a reflection on the self-deluding lures of spectatorship in general, we might understand the film's strategy as one that both makes such egoism visible and suggests the value of its dissolution. The dissolution of the self, of course, is the aspiration and fear of all passion, and it is to the film's credit that even our detachment from its characters can be ascribed to their imbrication in the narrative drama. This circularity from content into form, and back into content, like the movement of Johan's truck, emblemizes the film's striking mobility of address, which is not satisfied with the settled modes of either identification or distance. This perspectival oscillation may be the key to the film's attempt to reimagine the 'love story' as a fundamental challenge to storytelling, since any true romance must betray its characters if it wishes to remain faithful to the erratic movements of longing and regret that animate them.

We get a better sense of the film's self-consciousness in the scene following a second erotic rendezvous with Marianne, during which Johan has left his children in the care of a local stranger. When he returns to discover they are missing, he is informed that they are 'with Bobby in his van'. Though the audience immediately fears the worst – that his children have been molested in his absence – Johan finds his children innocently enjoying a vintage television performance by Jacques Brel. After a few seconds of viewing, Johan climbs inside the van himself, leaving Marianne standing outside alone. What is suggested by the fear generated by our anticipation? The fact that Johan is restored to his family does not cancel out our initial dread for their safety. Indeed, we experience the menacing atmosphere of Bobby's van all the more keenly because of the sense that any averted tragedy would have been an unintended consequence of Johan having abandoned his children in favour of a tryst with Marianne. The fact that the children are instead engaged in watching television, then, does not dispel our fears but displaces our sense of sexual anxiety onto the act of viewing itself. This impression is enhanced by Brel's sweaty performance, which mirrors the perspiration in the previous scene of lovemaking between Johan and Marianne (figures 12–15). There is a sense of elation in the relief that our morbid imaginations have not been confirmed, but even these joys are made to seem clandestine and vaguely illicit.

It may be, indeed, that the scene plays upon the cynical expectations of the film's secular audience in order to invoke the spectre of a religious prohibition against the moral ills of both visual technology and mass culture. In this case we are relieved that the children are unharmed, but also aware that their furtive viewing might be construed as moral misconduct by their larger community. According to Reygadas, similar

15 Jonathan Romney, 'The Sheltering Sky', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 18, no. 1 (2008).

16 See 'Making of...', in the 'Extra Features' section of *Silent Light*, Palisades Tartan Video (2009).

community strictures impeded the production of *Silent Light*, apparently marking it with a sense of its own impropriety: 'just driving around the area made people see me as a suspicious character', he observes; 'reproducing the image of human beings is forbidden, even in paintings, let alone photography – and let's not even mention cinema'.¹⁵ While Reygadas clearly seems to be exaggerating the taboo against film, the DVD extras provide ample evidence that the film's production was indeed met with scepticism, even among those who agreed to take part. One woman, who had allowed the film crew to use her house for interior scenes, expressed particular regret. 'I didn't want to let them use the house', she confides to the camera. 'People ask me what they're doing, or what they're doing it for. They didn't say anything to me about it, but I know we shouldn't do it.'¹⁶ We could say that *Silent Light* encrypts a version of this moral anxiety in the structure of the film itself, linking the narrative of Johan's guilt with the implication of the viewer's own indecency. The sequence in the van thus reinscribes our evident feeling of unease as a reaction to the false innocence of passive spectatorship, which, although seemingly innocuous, harbours the threat of a deeper harm.

In a telling and clearly reflexive move, the tape of Brel's performance is rewound after the scene's completion and shown to us again, but this time decontextualized, taking up the full frame, as if to reinforce the parallel between their act of viewing and our own. Furthermore, in this second viewing of the material we are shown not only Brel's performance but its conclusion, followed by the audience's reaction. In the contrast between their joyous applause and beaming faces and Brel's gaunt, exhausted physique we are made to recognize and reflect upon the parasitic voyeurism of aesthetic consumption, in which audiences are blissfully returned to themselves untroubled by either dependency or introspection. But this self-conscious gesture does not function wholly as an alienating effect; on the contrary, Brel's emphatically theatrical performance provides an unexpected relief from the worn, impassive expressions of the film's Mennonite performers. Indeed, the aged television footage feels oddly more contemporary, affecting us more immediately than the allegorical, loosely timeless terrain occupied by the film's characters. Brel's giddy artificiality lends the disappointed romance recounted in his song an air of comedy that Johan will evidently never be able to master.

These ambivalent scenes of cultural performance and spectatorship are significant because they serve as reminders of the distance between the film's subjects (for whom the radio and television seem rare, indulgent treats) and its audience (for whom they are likely habitual fixtures of ordinary life). Popular media intervene in our viewing of the film, at once demarcating and eroding the cultural codes that inform the film's exotic interest in Johan's rural life. The dramatic obverse of these spectacles – and the only other scene in the film to use music in any way – is that of Esther's funeral, which features other members of the Mennonite community singing a traditional hymn. In interviews, Reygadas has remarked that he was able to persuade members of the community to



Figs 12–15. Inside Bobby's van. Images from Palisades Tartan Video.

participate in the film by arguing for the documentary value of its portrayal of the songs and rites depicted in this final scene. But the film both relies upon these gestures of authenticity and subtly undermines their sincerity. For while *Silent Light* no doubt preserves with some fidelity the lives of the Mennonites who comprise its cast, the film is clearly invested in the aesthetic value to its audience of their unfamiliarity. As Reygadas explains in an interview for *Sight and Sound*:

The idea for choosing the Mennonites as a context for the love story was that I wanted something as timeless and placeless as possible. If you drive around on Mennonite land, you wouldn't know where you are or what era you're in, if not for the cars ... they're a uniform society: you wouldn't be distracted by whether one man is successful at his work or another is rich, or whether one of the women is very beautiful and has breast implants. I wanted to keep out all those things like interest, ego, jealousy, to keep only the archetypes, as in fairytales or myth.¹⁷

17 Romney, 'The Sheltering Sky'.

The odd intrusions of popular media into the otherwise remote landscapes of *Silent Light* threaten to disturb its archetypal uniformity, but they do so largely as a way of revealing and commenting upon Johan's own self-serving desire to escape the moralistic sanctions imposed upon him by his society. And yet, because there is also a voyeurism in our gaze into the film's allegorical purity, these scenes reflect a deep distrust of its own status as a cultural object and with the threat of self-consolidating fantasy implicit in all art. For while *Silent Light* certainly avoids the overtly fantasized visions of Hollywood glamour – opting deliberately for lead performers with weathered and austere appearances – it nevertheless plays upon a general nostalgia for a world still vulnerable to the fluctuations of nature, still permeated by the light of the horizon and the primordial sounds of animal terror but not yet consumed with the ills of technology. The commitment to nature is reinforced by the procedure of the film's production and Reygadas's avoidance of the manipulations of digital technologies. 'The real is always so much more beautiful in the end,' Reygadas notes, 'although it may glitter less. ... Now people think CGI images are more real than real images, so maybe we're losing the capacity to look at the world.'¹⁸ *Silent Light* may constitute an attempt to restore our capacity for visual purity, but it can only do so by repressing its awareness of film's own artificiality, as well as its anxiety that in offering its purified, allegorical world as a form of spectacle the film might inadvertently negate the ardent forms of reality it had wished to make available.

18 Ibid.

The success of our 'capacity to look at the world', Reygadas suggests, depends upon our ability to check the impassioned distortion of our perception, submitting to a reality principle far greater, and 'more beautiful', than our manipulation of it could equal. Certainly, one cannot miss the insistent and overwhelming images of the natural world in the

19 Loosely translated: 'We were clouds blown apart by the wind, / We were stones that often collided, / Raindrops dried by the sun, / Who never finished our drinking.'

film, which frame the narrative drama and punctuate it with an immensity of open space. And yet the landscapes of *Silent Light* are only ever provisionally sites of resolute externality, caught as they are in the tug of desire, loss and resignation. As the verse from 'No Volveré' recalls, the natural world provides an endless set of figurative comparisons for the dramas of the heart.¹⁹ But in the song, as in the film, the very metaphoricality of these connections tacitly announces the failure of desire to unite its objects. As Esther laments near the climax of the film, riding in a car with Johan:

Remember when we loved travelling like this? We wouldn't stop singing. We were always happy, or just remained silent, or I would fall asleep. However it was, just being next to you was the pure feeling of being alive. I was part of the world. Now I am separated from it.

How might participation in, or separation from, the world speak to the vicissitudes of romantic attachment staged by the film's aesthetics? From the gust of wind that dislodges Esther's hat while working in the field, to the violent rainstorm that coincides with her death; from the bed of flowers trampled in Johan's walk to meet Marianne, to the cedar leaf that impossibly falls from the ceiling following their lovemaking; the film is replete with the suggestion, by turns banal and blatantly overdetermined, that the romantic confusion of boundaries between self and other is paralleled in the uncanny overlapping of psychic and worldly space. But these correspondences reorganize the movements of desire and fulfilment in ways that preclude our ability to trace them safely back to specific characters. The beauty of the film's evocation of nature, and the aesthetic pleasure it elicits, allows for a delocalized articulation of emotions which we are left to confuse with our own, but whose ultimate lack of ownership must be interpreted as exemplary.

The best evidence of the work of correspondences in the film comes in its third scene. Johan and Esther have taken their family to a swimming hole for an afternoon of bathing and peaceful rest. The camera basks in the sight of the children lazily drifting through the water, while Johan and Esther are revealed on the banks, silently washing the children's hair. Evidently moved by their Edenic surroundings, Johan pays Esther (who is evidently aware of her husband's infidelity, though at the moment we do not know *how*) the dubious compliment of praising her skills at making soap. Whether the comment touches her with the simple intimacy of this knowledge, or wounds her with its disquieting insufficiency, Esther begins to stare disconsolately into the distance, keenly feeling the gulf that separates them. As a tear begins to well in her eye, Johan beckons her to collect herself and join the children for a swim, which she does, stifling the tear before taking his hand and leaving the frame. Here, however, the camera remains fixed on the empty space she had previously occupied, and, instead of rack-focusing on the flowers and bushes in the background, the image remains blurred while the camera tracks slowly forward, allowing a pink blossom to come gradually into focus as we

advance. When the flower is fully in focus – that is, when it rests at the same distance from the lens as Esther had previously – the camera stops and waits as a tiny drop of water gathers at the end of a petal before falling (figures 16–19).

In a manner that both revisits and revises the earlier scene of Johan's tears, the camera's forward motion suggests a movement towards interiority, even after Esther no longer occupies the frame. One result of this implication is that we read, in the figural relation of focal depth between the shot's two subjects, the drop of water as a kind of substitution for, or displacement of, Esther's unexpressed tear. One is tempted to connect this scene to the depiction of Esther's death, in which she breaks into tears during a rainstorm. But if the later sequence suggests a roughly simultaneous correspondence between natural and emotional expression, in the vein of Ruskin's 'pathetic fallacy', the water falling from the petal of the blossom does not coincide with Esther's tears but replaces them. This difference is significant because the contiguity of visual space at once fulfils and negates Esther's unexpressed emotion, making her tears visible on the condition of her absence. In the only gradually transformed field of the frame's blurred background, the film reinscribes her silent suffering in a manner that is powerfully immediate to the viewer but diegetically remote. The flower's slight release of water can mean little to any of the characters present, who most likely do not witness it, even though it accrues associative and metaphorical resonance for us. This remarkable shot – which begins as a counter-shot from Johan's perspective – divides the film's perceptible space between narrative and non-narrative information, while posing the two as roughly continuous. This continuity, however, is tenuous, and the very duration of the transition – the time spent drifting in the blurred passage from Esther's face to the flower – insists upon a crucial delay between literal and symbolic visibility. As the flower comes into focus through the artificial agency of the lens, the natural world thickens and condenses into a kind of mournful commentary on the proximate dramas of its inhabitants. Nature, then, is not Esther's affective mirror, but something like her silent chorus, reorganizing her experience into a sensible, but for her unobservable, form. The non-coincidence of these formal spaces may testify to Esther's later feeling of being 'separated from [the world]', but it also speaks to the way in which *Silent Light* takes such separation as the medium for a mobile and depsychologized way of looking. In such scenes the narrative drama recedes, giving way to nonhuman arrangements of that drama. These lateral figurations accentuate the keener moments of the film, but they also begin to wean us off our need for that story. Indeed, the most compelling moments of Reygadas's film are tinged with a longing to leave its characters behind in search of murkier terrain, as well as with an ultimate unreadiness fully to do so. (This is also, it bears noting, only a metaformal version of Johan's unwillingness to choose between Esther and Marianne.) What is the nature of this irresolute longing? Non-narrative abstraction, it would seem, promises an immediacy of emotion,



Figs 16–19. Esther's (Miriam Toews) tears. Images from Palisades Tartan Video.

untroubled by the clumsy detours of identification, performance or embodiment. Yet a film as careful in its allotment of time as *Silent Light* is evidently unconcerned with the lures of immediacy. Rather, I would suggest, the departure from narrative into the expressive tableaux of natural landscapes stems from an attempt to remain faithful to the elemental *ekstasis* of emotion, reflecting the film's sense that a true representation of affective states must in the end find a way to forget the tragic subjects who bear them only ineptly.

Silent Light, then, proposes a version of cinematic viewing marked by its precarious psychology, in which narrative identification has been suspended and framed by the expansive horizons of the natural world. The fact that the film is bookended by extended tracking shots of the sunrise and sunset underscores this point. The narrative events of the film – the affair, Esther's death and miraculous resurrection – are at once continued and interrupted by these framing sequences, which it would be tempting to read as majestic curtains theatrically marking the beginning and end of the drama. And yet the very duration of these sequences (each running for roughly five-and-a-half minutes) commands an intensity of investment beyond this prefatory or concluding function; instead, we come to see the sumptuously shot tableaux as extensions of the drama, prefiguring and rearticulating it in a more expansive and capacious idiom.

The dramatic association of these sublime landscapes is implicit during the film's opening (where the interstellar silence of the sunrise amidst the sounds of wailing animals is paralleled by the silent prayer being held at the breakfast table of our protagonist), but it is made explicit in the film's final sequence. In the final narrative scene of the film, Reygadas deliberately withholds the dramatic resolution by interrupting what would have been the reunion of Johan to the newly resurrected Esther. Although we are shown that Esther intends to forgive Johan (her first words upon being revived – 'Poor Johan' – suggest as much), and although we see Johan enter the room, Reygadas does not provide a visual confirmation of this expected reconciliation. We do not see, for example, Johan's disbelief, his heartsick apologies or their tearful embrace (which is how Dreyer concluded *Ordet*). In fact, we do not even get a counter-shot that shows Johan and Esther sharing the same space. Instead the camera, which occupies what we take to be Johan's perspective, simply shows Esther laying in the coffin, as a butterfly symbolically flies through the room and out of the window. The camera then perversely follows the butterfly, tracking it as it leads across the fields to the framed trees of the opening (figures 20–23). Thus the choreography of the sunset does not punctuate the end of the drama but comes in place of it, so that we are forced to read the unfulfilled relationship between Johan and Esther as elliptically inscribed in the changing rapprochement of sky and earth, night and day. When asked in interviews whether his representation of Esther's resurrection stems from his own faith, Reygadas has tended to deflect the question: 'In reality, I do not believe in miracles', he emblematically concedes in one case, 'but I think reality is a miracle'.²⁰

²⁰ Badt, 'Silent Light, or absolute miracle'.

In the resurrection, *Silent Light* presents us with an event that forces us to seek an explanation outside the logic of the narrative. The evanescent fluctuations of light and darkness in these framing scenes ensure that our hoped-for explanation will be missed, posing with utmost directness the narrative rift between what is shown and what is hidden, what is told and what remains silent.

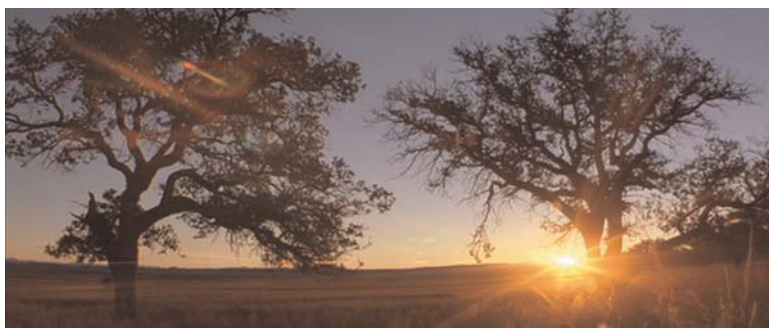
The sunrise and the sunset do not present the diegetic time of the narrative, for the film goes to great lengths to convey that the dramatic action takes place over many months, possibly even years. The film jumps suddenly from summer to winter to autumn to spring, sketching a timeline that is never fully clarified. Indeed, the whole film may be said to appear as the family does in the opening scene – reflected and distorted in the pendulum of a clock, which Johan proceeds to stop and which is restarted at the close of the film, following Esther's resurrection. The sunrise and sunset, then, neither initiate nor close the film; rather, they operate symbolically, offering displaced formulations of the film's thematic concerns. Or we might say that the plot itself can be read as a figurative restatement of the elemental love triangle between the earth, the light of the sun and the darkness of space. Strictly speaking, sunsets or sunrises are undepictable within the conventions of narrative cinema, since the real-time length of these events – tracing fully from darkness to light, or from early twilight to darkness – can be anywhere from an hour-and-a-half to two hours. This, provocatively, corresponds to the conventional length of a narrative feature, *Silent Light* included (whose proper narrative begins at 0:05:13 and ends at 2:02:00). In compressing the time of the sunrise and sunset into single shots, then, Reygadas structures the intervening drama as the experiential equivalent of the optical transformations that his camera technique elides.

The visual compression of time that Reygadas achieves for these sequences uses neither digital manipulation nor traditional time lapse. As he explains in an interview:

The dawn was one single morning, and dusk at the end of the film was one single dusk. As far as I know, it's the first time in cinema something like that has been done. It's time-lapse in a way – the timespan of the whole thing is about an hour and a half – but usually when you see time-lapse the clouds accelerate and everything moves whereas here the idea was to do it without any motion control. So it was just me pushing a cart with the camera on top and a series of takes cross-faded very carefully so everything flows. We'd do about a metre every two minutes, back and forth and back and forth, so it's about 50 segments during that hour and a half.²¹

The opening and closing shots, then, represent the arrival and departure of earthly light precisely by repressing the artefacts of its undepictability. With each seamless fade the film expresses a desire for a continuity that is materially unavailable to it. This condensation or ellipsis of time can also be felt in the film itself, whenever we are shown events whose context

21 Romney, 'The Sheltering Sky'.



Figs 20–23. Sunset. Images from Palisades Tartan Video.

22 This framing gesture of representational withdrawal brings *Silent Light* into conversation with Stanley Cavell's notion of cinematic 'silence', that is, of the need for film to acknowledge its separateness from the world it presents. 'It is for such reasons', he writes, 'that I speak of film's growing doubt of its ability to allow the world to exhibit itself, and instead its taking over the task of exhibition, against its nature. But the same techniques which serve to betray it can also be used, and seen, to keep faith with its nature.' Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 132 (my emphasis).

seems obscure or which are without a clear cause (such as Johan's tears in the first scene). The effect of the condensation of time is, paradoxically, to create the dual impression of both sensuous reality and visual impossibility, coupled with our inability to differentiate between the two. It may be true, as Reygadas laments, that we have lost 'the ability to look at the world', but the opening and closing sequences of *Silent Light* only ambivalently make the world present to the viewer. Or perhaps we might say that the film restores to the world its capacity to confound our vision.²² For we feel, despite the deliberate and measured advance of the camera, a sense of what has been skipped over. We feel that time has been accelerated, but we are unable to see the markers of this acceleration, making our vision of it puzzlingly unstable.

This endemic confusion might be one way to interpret the 'silence' referenced by the film's title. The notion that light might be silent suggests that it would have something to say to us if we were better listeners. Indeed, we are tempted to read the film as a narrative elaboration of the silence of the world, giving voice to what the world withholds from us in its reticent image. At the same time, the film's narrative – which ends abruptly, with the fallout from Esther's resurrection startlingly unresolved – does not itself add any clarity to this reading. If the film's title suggests that visibility conditions experience as a particular variety of concealment, the narrative romance retains much about it that is undisclosed. Traditionally the privileged space of narrative concealment is taken to be the psychological interior, behind which characters preserve the mystery of their intentions and motivations before the inevitable climaxes of confession or revelation: 'Does Johan love Esther or Marianne?' 'Who will he choose?' In *Silent Light* such questions are not unanswerable, it is simply that they seem strangely irrelevant. What matters is not the reason for or the cause of our emotions but the very externality of affect, its dislodging energies, by which we are consumed as if by a natural force. This interest in the oblique world of its characters, and in the oblique nature of character itself, is inscribed within the receding world of *Silent Light*, where identity is at once extended and lost. The self-consciousness of the film, its obsession with performance, reflects its conflicted desire to affirm a non-egoistic model of cinematic spectatorship. The recessive, self-effacing mode of viewing offered by *Silent Light* might not be practicably sustainable – as the film's abrupt ending attests – but the film makes a provisional appeal for a way of experiencing the world in which the sentiments aroused in us are not fully our own, elicited but not compulsively claimed.

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Tears, melodrama and 'heterosensibility' in *Letter from an Unknown Woman*

PANSY DUNCAN

¹ Brett Farmer, *Spectacular Passions: Cinema, Fantasy, Gay Male Spectatorship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 151–97.

² *Ibid.*, p. 151.

In the course of an engaging discussion of maternal melodrama, Brett Farmer offers a brief precis of a scene from the memorable gay coming-of-age drama *The Fruit Machine* (Philip Saville, 1988).¹ As Farmer describes it, the scene positions the young gay male protagonist and his mother in front of the classic romantic melodrama *Brief Encounter* (David Lean, 1945), and becomes witness to the spectacle of their tearful, absorbed response: after a tender embrace, ‘the two ... continue to watch together, enraptured and in tears, as the final scene of this famous film, loved by generations of women and gay men alike, plays itself out ...’.² For Farmer, what merits consideration here is the contiguity the scene sets up between the two figures’ viewing practices. By situating the prototypical gay male protagonist’s viewing practices in intense emotional and spatial proximity to those of the mother, the film locates the origin of gay spectatorship in the cultural cradle of maternal instruction. Yet what magnetizes my interest is less the causal relation than the resemblance between the two practices, a resemblance suggested by Farmer’s reference to ‘generations of women and gay men alike’. The spectatorial customs of the straight middle-aged woman and the young homosexual male vis-a-vis melodrama have acquired very different cultural connotations within the various theoretical projects to which they have been conscripted. While queer theory has recruited the gay spectator of melodrama as an icon for the subversive, recuperatory practice of ‘reading against the grain’, the female spectator of melodrama emblemizes, for much feminist theory, if

- 3 One useful measure of the range of feminist positions on female spectators' tears is the debate between Linda Williams and Ann Kaplan in *Cinema Journal*. See Linda Williams, "'Something else besides a mother': *Stella Dallas* and the maternal melodrama", *Cinema Journal*, vol. 24, no. 1 (1984), pp. 2–27, and Ann Kaplan, 'Ann Kaplan replies to Linda Williams' "'Something else besides a mother': *Stella Dallas* and the maternal melodrama'", *Cinema Journal*, vol. 24, no. 2 (1985), pp. 40–43.

- 4 Dana Luciano, 'Coming around again: the queer momentum of *Far From Heaven*', *GLQ: a Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, vol. 13, nos 2–3 (2007), pp. 252–53.

- 5 Ibid.

- 6 Roger Hallas, 'AIDS and gay cinephilia', *Camera Obscura*, vol. 18, no. 1 (2003), p. 93.

- 7 Patricia White, *Uninvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 94.

not complete consent then at least a saddened, reflective witness to the scene of female suffering.³ Yet here the weeping pair's responses conspicuously converge, as both mother and son submit to that most conventional of responses to the weepie – a genre for which the quantity of spectatorial tears extracted acts as a measure of artistic success. Setting aside for a moment the social disparity that codes their tears in such polarized ways – a man crying at melodrama is, of course, as conspicuous as a woman crying at melodrama is banal – the subjective and emotional similarities of the two equally lachrymose responses is worthy of note.

Yet despite the 'queerness' of the young man's absorptive acceptance of melodrama's emotional petition, practitioners of queer theory have tended to sidestep melodrama's more routine gratifications. For queer scholars, the classic melodramatic pleasures of 'having a good cry' remain circumscribed by the heteronormative narrative framework within which they are elicited, with queer viewing practices, conversely, envisioned as a form of cryptic decoding or fantasmatic recoding. According to Dana Luciano, for example,

the questing vision of queer aficionados of this traditionally heteronormative genre opens an alternate perspective on its meticulous designs, one that seeks out and attaches the surplus significance (visual, sonorous and rhythmic as well as affective, narrative and intertextual) of the domestic melodrama to active possibilities left undeveloped in the plot.⁴

Pitting the 'questing vision' of the queer spectator against the conventional emotional cues of a 'traditionally heteronormative genre', Luciano frames the former's intensive figurative labour as the exertion necessary to extract queer resources from texts that otherwise 'afford no recognition to the nonheteronormative'.⁵ In a similar vein, Roger Hallas argues that queer cinematic spectatorship constitutes a kind of narrative revision, drawing on 'the moment, the detail, the fragment' in a forceful 'rejection or neglect of narrative linearity and trajectory'.⁶ Patricia White's significant analysis of melodrama's ambiguous invitation to lesbian fantasy also aligns queer reading with the figural, addressing the genre's 'refusal of literal meaning' by way of teasing out what she calls its availability to 'crypto-lesbian satisfactions'.⁷ Emphasizing the symbolic and fantasmatic transformations film texts must undergo in order to achieve resonance within the queer imaginary, the critical assumption is that viewed – or read – straight, melodrama would tender only the most conventional gratifications.

Subtending these arguments, then, is an implicit opposition between queer and straight viewing practices, between the destabilizing power of queer decoding and the normalizing force of the classical Hollywood text. Yet this is an opposition whose solid entrenchment is quietly corroded by the above scene from *The Fruit Machine*, and an opposition I intend to interrogate further here. In what follows, I propose a queer reading of melodrama that reads *with* rather than *against* the text, and that situates

itself not in opposition to melodrama's affective solicitations but alongside them. This emphasis on the manifest, the obvious and the surface dovetails with the thinking of a number of prominent scholars whose work marks a turn away from 'symptomatic reading' and towards 'surface reading'. As Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus have recently argued in a special edition of *Representations* that both describes and exemplifies this trend, the critical practice that has prevailed in the text-based disciplines over the past few decades has been informed by the assumption that a text's truest meaning is 'hidden, repressed, deep and in need of detection and disclosure by an interpreter'.⁸ For Marcus and Best, however, as for the contributors to their volume, valuable and politically cogent meanings may be as readily located on the surface of the text as in its depths, as much in what the text clearly says as in what it obliquely or inadvertently suggests. Construing textual surface in multiple ways – as textual production and distribution; as intricate surface structure; as a site of erotic and affective investment; as what Paul de Man called the text's 'foreknowledge of criticism'; as literal meaning or face value – they thus suggest the possibility that, without becoming complicit in a text's normalizing work, we can nevertheless begin to depict what 'insists on being looked at rather than what we must train ourselves to see through'.⁹

Taking my cue from this work, I shall argue that the queer dimension of the melodramatic weepie lies not in its gaps, ellipses or recurrent figures but in what is perhaps the most conventional, 'obvious' and politically intransigent feature of the genre – its visual fascination with, and spectatorial solicitation of, tears. Employing as my paradigmatic example of the genre Max Ophüls's classic romantic melodrama *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948), a film whose every narrative turn is lubricated by its prodigiously lachrymose heroine, I show that the tears which sustain the genre's more normative objectives just as readily disrupt them. From a classically Foucauldian perspective, tears, like other somatic confessions, enforce a strictly disciplinary purpose, as 'an instrument by which the body is enlisted in the production of legibility in order to serve at surveillance's creation of domesticable bodies'.¹⁰ Yet unlike many critics writing in the shadow of this powerful argument, for whom queer spectatorship of melodrama must resist the genre's disciplinary coercions through practices of exposure and decoding, I argue that it may be precisely these disciplinary coercions that have stimulated queer investment in melodrama in the first place. In a series of close analyses, I frame melodrama's tears as the locus of a tension within the heteronormative project they are designed to serve, suggesting that the genre's disciplinary investment in tears as an expressive sign of heterosexual desire comes into direct conflict with its narrative production of the heterosexual couple. Marking the point at which the contradictory demands made of Foucault's 'docile bodies' come into full view, melodrama's obsessive disciplinary attention to tears also marks the point at which queer spectatorship and straight spectatorship can be seen to converge.

8 Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, 'Surface reading: an introduction', *Representations*, no. 108 (2009), p. 1. Other recent work on the topic includes Timothy Bewes, 'Reading with the grain: a new world in literary criticism', *Differences: a Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol. 21, no. 3 (2010), pp. 1–33.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

10 Mary Ann O'Farrell, *Telling Complexions: the English Novel and the Blush* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 6. Key works elaborating this argument in literary studies include: Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: a Political History of the Novel* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1987); D. A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988); Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: the Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1988).

A climactic scene in *Letter from an Unknown Woman* sees Lisa Berndl (Joan Fontaine) attempt to convince her husband of the irresistible strength of her love for another man. Incapable of marshalling the verbal resources necessary to convince him of her passion, she begins, in picturesque, atmospherically lit closeup, to cry. At the sight of her tears, Colonel Stauffer (Marcel Journet) is silenced, his ongoing insistence that his wife 'ha[s] a will' and 'can do what's right' abruptly cut short. Encoded as involuntary and irrepressible, Lisa's tears are bodily signs against which his words can have no authority, offering full somatic compensation for the failure of her spoken claim. As if conceding her point, Stauffer asks, somewhat tentatively this time: 'And has he no will of his own either?' Demonstrating tears' evidential and expressive force at the level of plot, this critical scene richly conveys the qualities that have made tears the ideal signifier for the inscription and regulation of heterosexual desire in melodrama's opulently weighted visual field. In their expressive force, tears resemble many other signifiers in the somatic repertoire of sensibility: the blush, the palpitation, the sigh. What gives tears their peculiar evidential purchase, however, is their ability to balance the demands of visibility with those of authenticity – a necessity in a contemporary visual culture whose investment in rendering subjects legible is matched only by its investment in subjectivity's supposed inaccessibility. On the one hand, tears possess an unparalleled air of genuineness: welling up out of the body as an involuntary overflow rather than a surface inscription, they seem to evade the taint of theatricality that typically attends bodily signs. On the other, they possess an exemplary visibility: while the blush is a purely epidermal event, tears are incorrigibly material, making them congenial to the requirements of the closeup. More easily than other bodily signifiers of sensibility, then, tears manage to meet the requirements of both authenticity and clarity at once.

The story of Lisa Berndl and her life-long, unrequited love for the charming concert pianist Stefan Brand (Louis Jourdan), *Letter* is in an ideal position to exploit tears' evidential promise as expressive signs of a forlorn heterosexual desire, submitting Lisa to frustration after frustration at the hands of her wayward, amnesiac beloved. Opening with Stefan's receipt of a letter from Lisa, the film unfolds within the bounds of this epistolary conceit, as the 'unknown woman' of the film's title makes herself known as Lisa, the woman with whom Stefan once spent a single passionate night. The film that follows is ventriloquized through her voiceover as she tells, in flashback sequences that assimilate her life story in her love story, the tale of her life-long devotion to the letter's addressee and her bearing of his child. Lisa herself articulates the basic premiss of the film: 'I never had any will except his'. Her feelings are quite literally *his* feelings, and her sensibilities cleave to the rhythms of her desire for him. The film's appointment of tears as the expressive sign best capable of communicating Lisa's seemingly inexhaustible desire is dramatized again and again across the course of the film. When a series of flirtatiously throwaway remarks demonstrate irrefutably that Stefan has failed to

11 Steve Neale, 'Melodrama and tears', *Screen*, vol. 27, no. 6 (1986), pp. 6–23; Franco Moretti, 'Kindergarten', in *Signs Taken for Wonders: on the Sociology of Literary Forms* (London: Verso, 2005), pp. 157–81.

recognize her as the woman who has loved him '[her] entire life', a series of closeups on the tears trembling in Lisa's eyes register the devastation his casual indifference causes. Likewise in the final sequence, when Stefan looks up from the film-length epistle with tears in his eyes, *Letter* has recourse to tears as the ultimate proof of his love, signs of his regretful participation in the kind of 'if only' moment that Steve Neale, drawing heavily on the work of Franco Moretti, has identified as key to melodrama's ability to elicit spectatorial tears.¹¹ Offered as the evidential testimony that his broken promises and hollow protestations have failed to supply, Stefan's tears elevate his love for Lisa beyond the logic of substitution that has thus far defined his relation to women. Reaching a climax at Lisa's final illness and death, the tears that suffuse the film work towards the visual authentication of heterosexual desire by securing its status not as socially enjoined construction but as irrepressible, involuntary force.

Tears' epistemic allure is clearly borne out in the history of melodrama criticism, where even critics like Neale – whose pioneering 'Melodrama and tears' remains a compelling exploration of the genre's pathetic mechanisms – retain expression and interiority as the dominant terms of their analysis. Yet if melodrama's liquid proof of emotion might once have been read expressively, more recent critical practice has trained us to view even the most apparently natural, self-evident bodily signs with suspicion. Indeed, one would be hard pressed nowadays to find a critic endorsing a straightforwardly expressive reading of tears. Michel Foucault's conceptualization of the regimes of disciplinary power within which our acts of self-revelation and self-disclosure take place is of particular importance in this development. Key here is his notion of the confession, which he elaborates as

a ritual of discourse where the subject who speaks corresponds with the subject of the statement ... a ritual which unfolds in a relation of power, since one doesn't confess without the presence, at least the virtual presence, of a partner who is not simply an interlocutor but the agency that requires the confession, imposes it, weighs it, and intervenes to judge, punish, pardon, console and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has to surmount in order to be formulated.¹²

12 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: The Will to Knowledge* (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 62.

The Foucauldian lesson communicated here is that at the very point at which we experience ourselves as most liberated – at the point of confession, whether verbal or physical – we are most in thrall to configurations of power that put these expressions to particular use. At play in this dazzling inversion of common-sense reasoning is Foucault's displacement of popular psychoanalytic discourses that figure power as a force that acts in a more or less repressive way upon a preexisting subject. In its place, Foucault installs an analytics of a specifically disciplinary power that functions positively to produce that subject. According to this logic, far from repressing the expressive signs by which we identify the

deepest recesses of our true self, power functions to solicit and regulate them by enlisting the reddened cheek, the teary gaze or the full-bodied swoon in a decisively social labour. In these terms, tears must be understood as expressing first and foremost not the private interiorities of the self but the subject's responsiveness to the normalizing machinery of disciplinary power. For Foucault, arguments about the widespread proscription of sexual and emotional expression function as ruses to distract from the multiple disciplinary forces that actually solicit and regulate the body's various 'confessions'. Such a reading would insist that if in crying at melodrama we experience our tears primarily as responses to the course of narrative events, this interpretation takes place only through a disavowal of the normalized onscreen matrix of feeling within which those tears are enlisted. According to this framework, it is only through melodrama's tearful codifications that moments of heterosexual disconnection and non-coincidence in melodrama register as pathos at all.

A Foucauldian analysis of power's saturation and regulation of the body has achieved broad theoretical uptake throughout the arts and social sciences. In film theory, however, it is Linda Williams's groundbreaking work on hardcore pornography that has best incorporated Foucault's ideas about the body into a rich analysis of filmic genre. An instalment in her broader project of engaging with non-classical body genres such as horror, melodrama and pornography, Williams's book *Hard Core* analyzes the somatic 'confessions' proffered by hardcore pornography as one modality of what she terms 'the knowledge-pleasure of sexuality'.¹³ According to Williams, hardcore pornography is structured primarily around a 'drive for knowledge', which exhaustively probes the invisible 'scientific truths' of sexuality by soliciting and extracting the supposedly involuntary, uncontrollable 'confessions' of pleasure, from erection and ejaculation to facial expressions of ecstasy.¹⁴ These paroxysms of pleasure, in turn, are organized according to a principle of 'maximum visibility', often at the expense of forms of realism that might be more arousing or naturalistic.¹⁵ However, Williams regards hardcore's emphasis on the physical 'confession' of sexual pleasure not as a measure of the genre's truth value or emancipatory licence, but as a sign that the mechanisms of power have extended their purchase on bodies and their pleasures. Reconfiguring as a distinctly cultural phenomenon what initially reads as an involuntary visceral reaction, she insists that 'arousal may occur, may seem like [a] reflex ... but [it is] culturally mediated'.¹⁶

Importantly for our purposes, Williams's discussion of the drive for knowledge through confession built into hardcore enables us to distinguish similar mechanisms in action in melodrama. As in hardcore, the tears, sobs and tremors that make up the genre's confessional vocabulary function as mechanisms by which the filmic and spectatorial body is enlisted in the project of offering up the measurable, confessable truths of heterosexual desire. Again as in hardcore, the genre is committed to engineering certain scenarios – in this case, scenarios of misrecognition, non-coincidence and loss – as a means both of licensing

13 Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), p. 3.

14 Ibid., pp. 48, 3, 50.

15 Ibid., p. 48.

16 Ibid., p. 5.

closeups of onscreen somatic confession and of soliciting similar responses from its audience. Whereas the truths ‘confessed’ by hardcore’s involuntary paroxysm of physical pleasure are explicitly sexual, the truths confessed in tears comprise a set of dysphoric emotions embedded in heterosexual plots of loss and longing. Yet this vocabulary of heterosexual feeling – what I will call a vocabulary of ‘heterosensibility’ – is quite as powerful an instrument as the lexicon of sexual pleasure in reconstructing sexuality into visual form. When *Letter* cuts from a shot of Lisa’s wayward beloved in a passionate clinch with another woman to a medium closeup of tears trembling in Lisa’s eyes, the evidential value of tears affords her frustrated desire the status not of cultural construction but of an uncontrollable, irrepressible force, thus helping to sustain the naturalness, priority and value of that desire. Incarnate in the spectatorial body as we cry along with Lisa, her tears are set loose from the domain of simulation in which they are implicated on screen, and authenticated as expressions of uncontrollable, involuntary feeling. To the precise extent, then, that tears read as spontaneous physical reflexes, a Foucauldian optic invites us to reconfigure them as an instruments in a disciplinary administration that enlists both onscreen and spectatorial bodies in the reproduction and naturalization of a heterosexual norm. At play in this reading, of course, is a divergence from a feminist tradition of melodrama criticism, in which discussions of the figures of sensibility that organize melodrama have principally addressed their role in shoring up the scene of sexual difference. Yet while tears have been coded as feminine, and while it is women who have most often functioned as their vehicle, a Foucauldian reading suggests that the disciplines by which the codes of sensibility have been inculcated in the subject bear quite as squarely on sexual trajectories, being responsive to heteronormative pressures and recruited to heteronormative ends. It is to this dovetailing of sexual and affective disciplines of the body that I mean the term ‘heterosensibility’ to refer.

While tears’ distance from the sex act might seem to compromise their testimonial efficacy as inscriptions of heterosexual desire, in many ways tears afford melodrama considerable advantage over hardcore pornography. As Williams demonstrates, the illegibility of female physical pleasure poses a real problem for hardcore’s drive to visual knowledge. For while it is possible, in a certain limited and reductive way, to ‘represent’ a man’s physical pleasure by showing erection and ejaculation, this level of visibility proves elusive in relation to female sexual pleasure. According to Williams,

anatomically, female orgasm takes place ... in an invisible place that cannot be easily seen. Where the male orgasm – ejaculation – offers incontrovertible proof of male pleasure, according to certain standards of evidence, the female orgasm is notoriously elusive and illegible.¹⁷

Hardcore’s response to this dilemma has been to draw on an alternative somatic lexicon for the expression of female pleasure – panting, cries and ecstatic facial expressions are among the genre’s favoured signs. Yet the

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 49.

woman's capacity for masquerade, a capacity so highly valued in other spheres of activity, weakens the testimonial value of the signs of female pleasure. This evidential instability represents a serious impediment to hardcore's goal of making visible the involuntary confession of female bodily pleasure. Though obviously several steps removed from what we have come to view as the ultimate scene of sexual pleasure's inscription – the sex act itself – melodrama offers a somatic vocabulary marked by both authenticity and legibility, making it a far more effective forum for the cinematic verification of female desire than hardcore.

Heterosensibility's powerful evidential force is compounded, paradoxically, by tears' status as the sign not of heterosexual fulfilment but of heterosexual loss. Frustrated, and thus nominally embattled, the heterosexual desire 'expressed' by tears can thus be conceived as everywhere resisted by the very social norms – and filmic narratives – that everywhere produce it. Tears, in other words, reproduce heterosexuality by producing it as repressed, beleaguered and endangered. Of course, it is impossible for *Letter* to mask the extent to which heterosexuality is ceaselessly enjoined of the subject. Indeed, many of the film's most pathetic moments arise through the ironic juxtaposition of Lisa's own quasi-religious love for Stefan with the more debased forms assumed by *fin-de-siècle* Vienna's ubiquitous heterosexual directive: Stefan's tawdry, compulsive promiscuity; the lasciviousness of the drunken soldier who offers to 'take [Lisa] somewhere ... anywhere will do'; her parents' obsessive efforts to orchestrate her engagement to a young Lieutenant. The film's gestures toward these alternative instantiations of heterosexual desire are a measure of its consciousness of the elaborate ways in which Lisa's 'subversive' desire is implicated in a wider series of social mandates for the production of heterosexual coupling. Yet *Letter*'s craft resides in its ability to mobilize the Foucauldian spectre of the regime of 'compulsory heterosexuality', not to disrupt but to shore up the fantasy of a naturalized heterosexual desire – an effect achieved primarily through the film's strategic use of tears.¹⁸ Exemplary here is a scene in which Lisa's widowed mother announces to Lisa her engagement to Herr Koestner and her intention to move the family to Linz. In underscoring the kind of petit-bourgeois pragmatism that governs Lisa's mother's engagement, the scene veers perilously close to exposing heterosexuality's entanglement in social norms; yet when Lisa greets this revelation by dashing from the room in tears, the film secures her desire for Stefan as somehow radically subversive of the disciplinary injunction to heterosexual coupling of which those tears are the supreme instrument. In dramatically opposing the bourgeois institution of marriage to the spectacle of Lisa's passionate 'true love', *Letter* manages to marshal the institutions that most clearly threaten the authenticity of heterosexual desire to the task of substantiating that authenticity. Tears' status as sign of a heterosexual desire aligned not with social obligation but with social disruption is buttressed by their irruptive physical properties: pouring out of the body rather than merely writing upon it, tears can seem to erupt into

18 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), p. xxviii.

19 Karen Hollinger and Virginia Wright Wexman, *Letter from an Unknown Woman: Max Ophüls, Director* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991), p. 130.

20 Glynis Kinnan, 'His story next to hers: masochism and intersubjectivity in *Letter from an Unknown Woman*', *Style*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2001), p. 263; Virginia Wright Wexman, 'The transformation of history: Ophüls, Vienna and *Letter from an Unknown Woman*', in Hollinger and Wexman (eds), *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, p. 9.

21 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, p. 105.

22 Griselda Pollock, 'Feminism/ Foucault – surveillance/sexuality', in Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey (eds), *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), p. 33.

the textual space of the film. After all, Lisa does not merely cry; as the shooting script has it she 'bursts into tears'.¹⁹ The efficacy of tears' work is evinced in references by Glynis Kinnan to 'Lisa's unorthodox desire' and Virginia Wright Wexman to Lisa's 'risking [her] security and life itself in the service of [her sexuality's] expression'.²⁰ The pathos of this image of a heterosexual desire heroically salvaged from the jaws of a society ceaselessly litigating against it unreflectively endorses the film's manufacture of a heterosexual desire that has all of the authenticity of the prohibited.

While I opened this essay with the claim that melodrama's tears might be amenable to a queer reading, my extended summary of a classically Foucauldian reading of tears has thus far served merely to emphasize tears' utility to a rigidly heteronormative somatic discipline. This manoeuvre is deliberate, for while the elaboration of tears' queer dimension is my aim, I want to suggest that this queerness actually inheres in melodrama's disciplinary agenda. At this point, however, it is worth turning the screw a little by noting that melodrama's disciplinary regulation of sensibility operates, at least ostensibly, in the service of a wider regulation of sexuality that has as its aim the production of the couple. Foucault's analysis of 'the Malthusian couple', for example, makes it clear that the couple formation remains a primary objective of disciplinary practice, its formation one of the 'four great strategic unities which, beginning in the eighteenth century, formed specific mechanisms of knowledge and power centering on sex'.²¹ The disciplinary culture that solicits and regulates Lisa's tears, then, is part and parcel of a systematic formation of compulsory heterosexuality, that should, as Griselda Pollock puts it in Foucauldian mode, 'ensure a healthy, active, adult reproductive heterosexuality upholding social power and cultural leadership'.²² Indeed, the production of the couple is an endeavour that the *Letter* insistently avows as its own, as Lisa's hyperbolic voiceover testifies: 'All I wanted was to be near you again ... to throw myself at your feet and cling to them and never leave you'. Yet it is in the assumption that the somatic lexicon of heterosensibility can be thoroughly subsumed to such an objective that things become complicated. For while their labour of heterosexual naturalization seems to bind *Letter*'s tears unassailably to this end, the reality is less distinct. In fact, as I will show, the film's relentless commitment to the exhibition and solicitation of tears threatens first to distract from and finally to derail the 'regime of compulsory heterosexuality' that they are intended to enforce. With tears' conscription to a narrative of heterosexual loss continually disrupted by the film's disciplinary commitment to their glamorized display, the affective signs routinely mortgaged to a straight reading of melodrama become hospitable to one that is decidedly queer.

This systemic tension in *Letter*'s deployment of tears is starkly apparent in the first of two scenes set in the railway station, as Lisa bids farewell to

Fig. 1. Joan Fontaine as Lisa, in
Letter from an Unknown Woman
(Max Ophuls, 1948).



Stefan the morning after their first romantic tryst. At one level, the shot/reverse-shot alternation of the image of Lisa's tearful face with the image of Brand, a minute figure waving from the window of a retreating train, contains her tears within a strictly circumscribed heterosexual economy. The operation of an inflexible heterosexual norm is underscored by the rigid spikes of the iron railings that frame Lisa's person and betoken the inscription of this particular loss in a cycle of female bereavement and sacrifice that – foreshadowed by the demise of Lisa's father and anticipating the later devastating loss of her son – is assumed to organize the life of a good woman. Yet the enthralled visual pleasure that suffuses the shot wholly overwhelms her tears' intended meaning. Indexed as much in its lingering duration as in its slow track in to closeup, the purely ocular gratifications the shot engenders are amplified by the glamour of Fontaine herself, whose delicate beauty transposes the pity invited by Lisa's tragic lot into an unreflective veneration of the actress who plays her. This tension between the lack her tears are intended to 'mean' and the sumptuous pleasure of their visualization marks the presence of a disciplinary investment in heterosensibility that the film must continually disavow in order to maintain heterosexual union as ostensible aim and telos (figure 1).

This conflict is perhaps most clearly embodied in the character of Lisa, whose putative desire for union with Stefan is so overdetermined by her status as the vehicle for the film's disciplinary investment in tears that her allegiance can frequently seem to lie not with Stefan himself but with the lexicon of heterosensible signs through which that allegiance is conventionally expressed. One early scene foregrounds this ambivalence, through an ironic juxtaposition of the explicitly sexual fantasy life of her young friend Marie with Lisa's more conspicuously heterosensible one.

As the scene opens we see Lisa idling on the swing in the courtyard of her apartment block, her whole body attuned to the sound of Stefan's piano-playing as it wafts from an upper window. When Marie arrives, she boasts to Lisa about a boy who has been touching her 'right on the street!': 'I'll have to do something about him if he doesn't keep his hands to himself', Marie remarks, her declared desire that he 'keep his hands to himself' failing to conceal her longing that he do just the opposite. If Marie's fantasy about a boy who can't 'keep his hands to himself' evokes the spectacle of a directly sexual engagement, the cutaway shot to which we transition at this point – an image of the upstairs apartment room in which Stefan is playing, followed by a closeup of his fingers thrilling the upper keys of the piano – frames Lisa's fantasy in very different terms, pointing up a key difference between the two girls' relation to the sexual act that is assumed to form the culmination of heterosexual desire. Whereas Marie wishes to be touched by her boyfriend's hands, Lisa, it would appear, desires only to be 'touched' by the pulsations of heterosensible feeling set in motion by Stefan's mournful playing. As the film will go on to show, far from facilitating heterosexual union, the heterosensible labours to which Lisa devotes herself enable her to detach herself from the system of heterosexual exchange, whether embodied in the dreary bourgeois marriage in which her parents hope to place her or in the more dubious sexual transactions that take place around her during her employment at Madame Spitzer's as a tailor's model. As Madame Spitzer informs a male customer who conveys his unsavoury interest in the young beauty: 'She is not like the other girls: every evening as soon as the shop is closed – off she goes, right home'. Lisa's engrossment in the signs of heterosensibility renders her uniquely aloof from the sexual commerce of heteronormative exchange. Indeed, Lisa's investment in producing the liquid proof of desire so comprehensively deemphasizes desire's fulfilment that when Stefan finally gets Lisa home to his flat, encircles her in his arms and leans in for a passionate kiss, the embrace can seem like a disruption rather than a consummation of the film's romantic mise-en-scene – a mise-en-scene from which, until now, the putative object of her tears has been almost entirely absent.

The fascination with tears that *Letter* shares with its protagonist, then, can often seem to betray the operation of a disciplinary motive quite at odds with the aspiration that both Lisa and the film everywhere avow as their one and only – the desire for romantic union with the beloved. *Letter*, however, is quick to dissimulate this dilemma, working to screen its obsessive discursive production of tears by repeatedly producing these tears as hidden, concealed or repressed. When Lisa responds to the news that her family's move will separate her from Stefan by dashing to her room in a flood of tears, the film disavows the extent to which these tears are generated by the visual field that she now runs from, figuring them as resistant to its own, or indeed any, visual solicitations. In the architectural interior of her bedroom, Lisa's tears accrue the weight of psychic interiority. No accident, then, that the film's commitment to the depiction

Fig 2. The concealment of tears.



of Lisa's tears is matched by its commitment to the portrayal of Lisa hiding them. Time and again Lisa screens her tears with a curtain, buries them in her hand, conceals them behind closed doors or visibly suppresses them. Indeed, where Lisa's own efforts of concealment fail, the film steps in. When, in the first railway station sequence, a sobbing Lisa finally turns her back on the camera and begins retreating into the distance, the camera's hesitant pursuit of her is very quickly cut short, encoding her tears as a private act on whose raw vulnerability the presence of the camera would constitute an unconscionable intrusion. Trained to view these gestures of circumspection as a response to a social and filmic prohibition on expressions of 'heterosensibility', we thus absolve Lisa's tears of their implication in the productive solicitations of heterosensible discipline, enabling the film, paradoxically, to produce tears under the sign of their repression.

While plainly designed to obscure the film's disciplinary investment in Lisa's tears, however, it is this very drama of suppression and concealment that finally testifies to it. After admitting to her husband that she intends to leave him for the recently rematerialized Stefan, Lisa retreats upstairs, somewhat mechanically, to wish her son goodnight. During this customary nocturnal ritual, convention demands that Lisa hold back her tears; it is only when she determines that her son is fast asleep that she feels able to give in to emotion, yet even then she feels compelled first to switch off the lamp and then to turn away and hide her face in a conveniently located curtain (figures 2 and 3). These gestures are clearly pitched, at the level of narrative, to substantiate her tears' status as a purely private affair, yet the visual logic of the episode gives it quite the opposite effect. For this clandestine turning away might be more accurately framed as a kind of turning towards: waiting for Lisa at the



Fig 3.

window is a camera that tracks in rapidly for a medium closeup on her frenzied rush of tears before she finally buries them in the curtain. At the level of character psychology, it is hard not to read this shot as a suggestion that lachrymose self-exposure holds a very real pleasure for Lisa, a pleasure manifest in and as her pageantry of concealment. This implication is far from exceptional in the film; it also occurs when Lisa's realization that Stefan has failed to recognize her compels her out of his apartment and into the city square below. In running from Stefan's gaze, she rushes directly into the cold, ocular embrace of a looming overhead crane shot that suddenly emerges as the locus of a counter-erotic investment of its own. Lisa's own pleasure in the concealment and display of tears, however, is not limited to mere character idiosyncrasy. Rather, it overflows the diegesis to become an index of the tensions between heterosensible discipline and heterosexual union that regulate the film as a whole.

If this tension is clear at the level of the image, it is even more starkly apparent at the level of narrative. For tears' semantic specificity as expressive signs of loss means that more than merely marginalizing Lisa's romantic union with Stefan, they actually necessitate its failure. Despite positing heterosexual coupling as its aim, melodrama's ability to authorize the discursive production of tears of heterosexual loss depends on its repeated deferral of such a coupling, resulting in a number of points of narrative instability. As many critics have noted, Lisa actively denies Stefan the opportunity to come to know and love her by avoiding, at significant moments, acknowledgment of their past together – refusing to tell him her name, withholding knowledge of the birth of their son, passing up the chance to declare her love. Whatever romantic rationale she provides for her sudden retreat from the chase at the very moment she

23 This generic rhetoric has been critically enshrined in a number of readings of melodrama. Neale, for example, defines melodrama as a genre in which the union of a central couple is repeatedly thwarted by 'missed meetings' and 'failed or inadequate communication'. Neale, 'Melodrama and tears', pp. 6, 19. For Neale, these scenarios solicit tears from the spectator by building the sense that 'the attainment of the object of desire [is] impossible' (p. 22).

might secure him – 'I wanted to be the one woman who asked nothing of you' – a strictly surface reading discloses not a frustrated movement towards Stefan but a deliberate movement away. Given the persistence of this logic, that which melodrama criticism figures as 'missed' encounters – moments of misrecognition and mistiming – might be better understood as encounters strategically avoided by a disciplinary mechanism intent on producing an adequate supply of tears.²³ Though narrative coherence requires that *Letter* encode the story's abortive romance as a series of regrettable accidents that take place against both Lisa's and the film's own wishes, attention to the pulse-like frequency with which tears appear in the film reveals them as a series of rhythmically calculated necessities, in service to disciplinary objectives that exceed the demands of individual psychology. Indeed, if this disciplinary investment in tears has been wholly disavowed at the level of both narrative and critical reception, it is freely embraced at the level of genre and popular audience investment. Melodrama's generic nominations – 'weepie', 'tear-jerker', 'sob-story', 'five hankie-film' – reveal tears' widely accepted status as objects of a generic and disciplinary desire whose strength the genre's repeated avowals to the contrary can do nothing to mask.

Though clearly invested in perpetuating the labour of heterosensible discipline, Ophuls's capacious directorial irony accommodates a subtle reflexive commentary on that discipline, slyly conceding the non-expressive status of both its own tears and those of the genre in general. During a key scene at the opera in which Lisa encounters Stefan for the first time in nine years, her voiceover announces her heartfelt belief that 'nothing happens by chance: every moment is measured; every step is counted'. Here, using Lisa as its mouthpiece, the film deposes the logic of chance failure that underpins the melodramatic tradition and replaces it with a fatalistic logic whereby her repeated failure to coincide with Stefan is the effect not of accident but of calculation. In this, *Letter* indirectly underscores the disciplinary necessities that determine the film's endless series of 'missed' encounters. Similarly, when a characteristic fit of wistful retrospection sees Lisa reminiscing about her father, an 'Assistant Superintendent of the Municipal Waterworks', the film offers a sly intimation of the almost infrastructural status that tears have acquired within the genre in general. This reflexive acknowledgement of tears' generic status is reinforced at the level of form, in the dissolves that the film favours over the more conventional cut as a method of transition between the framing and nested diegeses, between the scene of the letter's reading and the lost world it conjures up. Bearing more than a passing resemblance to tears welling up in the camera's gaze, these dissolves figure tears not as expressions of individual feeling but as features of the film's own mechanics, implying tears' analogous power to lubricate the genre's disciplinary operation.

No matter how adamantly tears would seem to assert their status as objects of generic and disciplinary desire, melodrama criticism has resolutely refused to read them outside the coordinates of expression. Indeed, for earlier neo-Marxist and feminist critics of melodrama, this expressive framework has such cachet that it seems to license eliding tears altogether, allowing the image of the tearful face to vanish spontaneously into the emotion it is construed to express. Neo-Marxist critic Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's influential analysis of the film melodrama as a 'hysterical' text, in which an emotionalism that 'cannot be accommodated within the action is ... traditionally expressed in ... certain elements of the mise-en-scene', disregards the material signs that enable him to make this reading.²⁴ Tania Modleski, a feminist critic working within a psychoanalytic framework, does something similar. While tendering the broad claim that melodrama 'provid[es] an outlet' for a repressed feminine voice – 'the subversive element of feminine desire which is struggling for expression' – she studiously ignores the lachrymose imagery through which this 'feminine desire' is visually discharged.²⁵ Yet where the desires 'expressed' by tears are more often than not mortgaged to the genre's rigorously heteronormative narrative trajectories, the default effect of tears' elision is that their heterosexual freight gets trafficked directly into theory under the guise of the 'return of the repressed'.

Neale marks the burgeoning of a more exacting critical scrutiny of melodrama and tears in his 1986 essay. Yet the expressive model and its characteristic effects remain stubbornly in place. Drawing on Moretti's study of pathos in Italian boys' stories, the essay presents a perceptive analysis of melodrama's manipulation of timing and perspective – the host of narrative devices through which melodrama toys with a spectatorial desire ostensibly cathected to the goal of heterosexual union.²⁶ However, while delivering a sophisticated series of insights into melodrama's pathetic mechanisms, Neale elides the onscreen rhetoric of crying through which these moments of delay and misrecognition are codified as occasions for spectatorial tears in the first place. In disregarding this rhetoric, Neale ends up endorsing and perpetuating it, deploying spectatorial tears as expressive witness to our innate sadness at 'the vicissitudes of [what the text inscribes as heterosexual] desire' and 'the loss of the union of mother and child'.²⁷ Neale is not insensitive to what he calls melodrama's 'excess of effect over cause' – for our purposes, its excess of tears.²⁸ Yet he nonetheless explains away this excess as an effect of melodrama's dramatization of the discrepancy between the 'wish' for heterosexual union and reality of its failure, encoding spectatorial tears as expressive responses to points of non-coincidence and misrecognition, points of 'blockage' and 'frustration', in the fulfilment of heterosexual desire.²⁹ Thus, while noting its consistent absence and failure at the level of discourse, Neale stubbornly preserves heterosexual union as melodrama's true aim.

A similar tendency is evinced in Williams's influential work on the genre in her essay 'Melodrama revised'.³⁰ Collating the earlier insights of

²⁴ Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, 'Minnelli and melodrama', *Screen*, vol. 18, no. 2 (1977), p. 117.

²⁵ Tania Modleski, 'Time and desire in the woman's film', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 23, no. 3 (1984), pp. 258, 51, 58.

²⁶ Neale, 'Melodrama and tears', pp. 6–23.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 19.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³⁰ Linda Williams, 'Melodrama revised', in Nick Browne (ed.), *Refiguring American Film Genres: Theory and History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 42–88.

31 Ibid., p. 58.

32 Ibid., pp. 52, 51. Williams draws heavily on the work of Peter Brooks for this argument. See Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976).

33 Williams, 'Melodrama revised', p. 52.

34 Ibid., p. 53.

35 Ibid., p. 70.

36 Gaylyn Studlar, 'Masochistic performance and female subjectivity in *Letter from an Unknown Woman*', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 33, no. 3 (1994), p. 40.

37 Ibid., p. 41.

Christine Gledhill and Robert Altman into an 'even bolder statement' – 'not that melodrama is a submerged or embedded tendency within realist narrative ... but that it has more often itself been the dominant form of popular moving-image narrative' – Williams argues for a new approach to melodrama not as a genre but as a mode.³¹ According to Williams, the melodramatic mode's most significant feature is its investment in 'moral legibility', as it attempts to assign guilt and innocence in a 'postsacred world' where the waning of 'the traditional imperatives of truth and morality' has destabilized both the categories and the markers of virtue.³² Most promising for our purposes is Williams's suggestion that tears have an important role to play in this project, functioning as reliable somatic signs of a virtue that often suffers from being hidden or misunderstood.³³ Yet while gesturing towards a reading that situates tears within a wider disciplinary endeavour, the way that Williams frames this endeavour – as an effort to 'force the status quo to yield signs of moral legibility' – encodes these tears in expressive terms, with words like 'force' and 'yield' implying that what is at stake is less the textual and ideological production of the signs of virtue than pressuring a preexisting virtue into view.³⁴ This uncritical acceptance of tears' claims to expressive authenticity is remarkable in light of Williams's own penetrating analysis of the rhetoric of the confession in her earlier *Hard Core*. Even more remarkable is the theoretical disconnect between her discussion of both the onscreen vocabulary of feeling and the genre's ability to move its audience. This disconnect tends to foreclose a sense of the way in which the filmic rhetoric of tears functions to codify or regulate spectatorial tears. In lieu of these kinds of correlations, Williams recapitulates Neale's expressive reading of tears as a response to the genre's pathetic mechanisms of misrecognition and delay. As she concludes, we cry when something is lost that cannot be regained: 'it is this feeling that something important has been lost that is crucial to crying's relation to melodrama'.³⁵ Incarnate in the spectatorial body, the disciplinary project at stake in melodrama's rubric of heterosensibility is dissolved into a palpable expressive self-evidence.

Critics have not been entirely insensitive to the possibility that melodrama's use of tears is actuated by a logic other than that of expression. Gaylyn Studlar, for example, has suggested that *Letter*

offers a heroine whose actions adhere closely to clinically based descriptions of masochism ... to what we might call masochistic performance. The performance of suffering is the masochistic subject's active solution to early, passively experienced anxieties and relational conflicts.³⁶

Resisting conventional constructions of the film that meticulously neglect Lisa's affective quirks, Studlar draws on the psychoanalytic model of masochism to frame Lisa's attachment to the active 'performance of suffering' as a kind of behavioural compensation for earlier forms of suffering passively endured.³⁷ While disputing the content of previous

Fig. 4. The sentimental education of Stefan (Louis Jourdan).



³⁸ For other readings of *Letter from an Unknown Woman* that take the masochistic line on Lisa, see Kinnan, 'His story next to hers', pp. 258–69, and Susan M. White, *The Cinema of Max Ophüls: Magisterial Vision and the Figure of Woman* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 161.

responses, however, Studlar does not challenge their coordinates. Her reading ultimately maintains character desire – or, in this case, character pathology – as the sovereign principle at work in the film. Indeed, the taxonomical subtlety with which Studlar calibrates Lisa's desire functions finally to deflect recognition of the extent to which what reads as individual character desire is overdetermined by melodrama's heterosensible disciplinary work.³⁸ While not disputing the psychoanalytic content of Studlar's analysis of Lisa, I would suggest that her diagnosis needs to be supplemented with an equally rich sense of the extent to which Lisa's 'masochism' falls strictly in line with – is both a function and an effect of – the normalizing disciplines of heterosensibility. Lisa is clearly encoded as a kind of exemplar of idealized femininity: her tremulous sighs, her halting, childlike voice and her fragile beauty encode an ideal image of normative femininity. Yet it is precisely *as* the epitome of a reified heterosexual femininity that Lisa is indistinguishable from a masochist. On the one hand, disciplines of heterosensibility construct in Lisa a perfectly socialized body, a body justly privileged in its ability to render heterosexual desire ideally legible. On the other hand, this body's hyperinvestment in heterosensibility makes her a solitary epicure of the very affective signs meant to express her desire for union with another.

The chaste isolation towards which Lisa's investment in heterosensibility finally propels her is most radically dramatized in the film's deliberate confounding of Lisa's intense heterosensibility and the encroaching disease that ultimately takes her life. Excusing herself from her box at the opera so as to escape Stefan's amorous gaze, Lisa explains to her companions that she has a headache. If this is, in one sense, a lie – both the film's visuals and its voiceover make clear that it is Lisa's

Fig. 5. A couple united in and through tears.



nervous anxiety over Stefan's proximity that drives her from the box – the film's insistent overidentification of desire with suffering makes Lisa's small untruth seem less a falsehood than an incisive description of her own condition, unmatched elsewhere in her self-deceiving personal mythos. In these terms, Lisa's contraction of typhus in the film's closing scenes seems to mark not the suspension but the apotheosis of the rituals of sensibility that have brought her desire into visibility throughout the film. When, in its final sequence, the film cuts from the painful memories conjured up by the content of the letter to the scene of its writing, a spectator could be forgiven for being unable to distinguish Lisa's 'throbbing' head and 'burning' temples from the swoons, blushes, sighs and palpitations she has produced throughout the film. 'Now I'm alone. My head throbs, and my temples are burning,' she writes, before lifting her hand to her typhus-stricken forehead and dropping her pen. Alone at last with the sensations that have repeatedly forced her into solitude, this homology of the signs of sensibility and those of disease situates death, not heterosexual union, as tears' logical narrative complement.

As if in a last-ditch attempt to resolve this representational dilemma, *Letter* constructs an almost impossible scenario in which these tears of heterosexual loss can be conceived as heterosexually mutual, and in which love can be consummated in and as the exchange of tears. Transitioning from the scene of the letter's composition to the present moment of its reading, we dissolve from Lisa's last moments at the writing desk to a closeup of the pathetic inscription from the hospital that stands in place of her signature ('the patient uttered your name just before she died'). Having absorbed the implications of the message, we then cut to a shot of a devastated Stefan, tracking rapidly to a closeup in order to absorb the

sight – resplendently illuminated by the desk lamp at his side – of the tears that stand glistening in his eyes (figure 4). The dramatic weight with which a sudden surge of bass strings burdens the moment recalls us to one of the harshest ironies of the woman’s weepie: that while it is a woman who cries, it is a man’s affective discipline that is really at stake, and that Lisa has suffered in order to give Stefan his sentimental education. Yet the injustice of this revelation is softened somewhat as yet another dissolve transports us from the present moment of Stefan’s newly-minted sentiment to his blurry internal recapitulation of earlier moments in the narrative – Lisa waiting in the snow outside his apartment (figure 5), Lisa looking up at him admiringly as he serenades her on the piano. Conferring upon them the hazy quality of images seen through tears, the wispy vignette that borders these shots enables the film to unite Lisa and Stefan as a couple in and through the tears that signal the failure of their union. According to this fanciful resolution of melodrama’s disciplinary double-bind, loss actually seals heterosexual coupling – even as it evacuates it of content, permitting its realization only in the hypothetical realm delineated by melodrama’s plaintive ‘if only’.

Superlatively evidenced, then, in the tears of both its characters and its ideal spectators, the heterosexual desire visualized in *Letter* is almost completely evacuated of heterosexual content. It is Stefan’s furniture that first captures Lisa’s attention, and the sound of his piano-playing that holds it; while his occasional physical cameos only intrude on the extended episodes of languid retrospection and inchoate longing that characterize the film as a whole. A number of queer theorists have noted the extent to which queer desire’s historical status as that which the coordinates of modern western sexual discourse nominally foreclose places it in an overdetermined relationship to the figure of emptiness. For Mark Finch and Richard Kwietniowski, gay investment in melodrama revolves around an ‘empathy with melodrama’s painful impossibilities’, while for Patricia White it is melodrama’s negativity – in particular the sacrificial trope that structures the genre – that makes it congruent with an embrace of other sexual possibilities.³⁹ According to this model, it is in its gaps and lacunae that melodrama has become susceptible to gay and lesbian encoding. Yet whereas for Finch and Kwietniowski locating and decoding these gaps requires extensive critical detective work, I have argued that such gaps subsist on the surface of the ‘weepie’ as a series of deficiencies in heterosexual content marked out by the genre’s most obvious trope: its tears. My queering of *Letter*, then, attends not to that which is ‘encrypted’ in the film but to that which is patently obvious in it; and involves less a heightening of figural sophistication than a dialling down of the figural sophistications by which critics have traditionally transformed Lisa’s every move away from Brand into a sign of her desire for him. In a shift from the psychoanalytic to the filmic, from the figurative to the literal, I have attempted to locate the film’s queerness in its visual fascination with, and narrative solicitation of, tears.

39 Mark Finch and Richard Kwietniowski, ‘*Maurice*: homo is where the het is’, *Screen*, vol. 29, no. 3 (1998), p. 73; White, *Uninvited*, pp. 61–75.

Melodrama's lexicon of heterosensibility is fundamentally slippery, continually evading, deferring and derailing the 'regime of compulsory heterosexuality' that it is conscripted to secure. Indeed, as *Letter* and its critics so vividly demonstrate, participation in the theatre of heterosensible feeling leaves one vulnerable to diagnoses of masochism, autoeroticism or homosexuality quite as readily as it makes one available to glorification as an avatar of polished femininity. If the principal lesson of Volume I of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* is that at the very moment we believe we are most free we are most subjected, my own lesson takes Foucault's as its springboard to suggest, with only minimal contradiction, that at the very point we believe we are most subjected we may be very nearly at our queerest. Melodrama's menagerie of tremulous bodies, uniquely capable of authenticating heterosexual desire through the somatic lexicon of heterosensibility, is also an assembly of bodies whose attachment to heterosensible feeling renders them unreceptive to the 'regime of compulsory heterosexuality' that forms melodrama's ostensible objective. As melodrama's evocative generic tags suggest, its investment in tears, like Lisa's own, far exceeds its investment in the heterosexual union for which those tears appear to fall. The value of tears for this reading, then, lies less in their ability to yield a queer reading of *Letter* than in their function as a productive switch-point for collapsing the difference between queer and straight viewing practices, between the subversive and the tautly disciplinary. In their dual status as at once the ultimate verification of, and the ultimate obstacle to, the conventional course of heterosexual desire, tears make it possible to trace melodrama's 'queer' and 'straight' spectatorships to the same uneasy origin: the genre's compulsive disciplinary attraction to the image of the tearful face.

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Reel time: ethnography and the historical ontology of the cinematic image

ANAND PANDIAN

This essay seeks to make a case for the conceptual significance of ethnographic attention to filmmaking practice. Relying upon fieldwork on location with a contemporary south Indian film director, I draw attention to three domains of temporal experience through which cinematic images gain their form – perception, action and affection. I do not argue that such attention will somehow complete or correct the picture we may have of an empirical situation – film production – that remains simply neglected or misunderstood. Instead, I hope to show that there are unresolved problems with respect to cinematic experience that are most effectively confronted through an ethnographic examination of such practices. These problems have most centrally to do with time: the apparent contradiction between film's static and discontinuous frames, and the continuous flux of reality to which they attest. This essay addresses itself to this persistent impasse by undertaking a 'historical ontology' of cinematic images: by attending, that is, to the accidents, eruptions and limits of circumstance through which films are invested with determinate form. Cinema can give us the experience of time in its fluxion only because it is made in such a time. What is expressed both by cinema and by the conditions of its emergence, in other words, is the creative potential of temporal duration. I therefore seek less to locate or contextualize a particular practice of filmmaking than to elicit its temporal textures of perception and action, thought and sensation, chance and intention.

Cinema has long been seen to express a paradoxical relationship to time. In the era of cinema's inception in the West, Mary Anne Doane has observed, capitalist modernity rendered time palpable in two contradictory ways: through its standardization and abstraction in proliferating clocks, schedules, tables, and routines, but also through its celebration as a field for the appearance of the contingent, accidental, and unexpected.¹ 'Time's reality in the cinema' is therefore twofold, Doane argues: 'both that of continuity and rupture'.² On the one hand, from its early portrayal of 'actualities' onward, cinema has continually shown and assured us that 'Something is happening'.³ But on the other hand, running films have done so only by hiding from us what is really happening onscreen: the necessary and relentless fixity and stillness accompanying each shift from static frame to frame. With this distinction between appearance and reality, Doane's argument implies that there is something deeply ideological in the association of cinema with temporal contingency in modern times: 'In the face of the abstraction and rationalization of time, chance and the contingent are given the crucial ideological role of representing an outside, of suggesting that time is still allied with the free and indeterminable'.⁴ Cinematic time may indeed often be the object and context of such ideological operations, and such operations in and through time may indeed constitute familiar subjects of experience. An essential question nevertheless remains: is the relationship between cinema, time and freedom no more than a chapter in the history of ideology?

Another tradition in studies of the cinema has taken these three terms instead as elements of an ontology of the image and its capacities. André Bazin, Gilles Deleuze and others have argued that the cinematic medium is uniquely poised to convey the flux of time within which living things emerge, exist and evolve, its universe of moving images potentially enabling a perception of time itself as pure becoming.⁵ 'The cinema makes a molding of the object as it exists in time and, furthermore, makes an imprint of the duration of the object',⁶ Bazin famously wrote, for example, drawing upon Henri Bergson's influential early twentieth-century distinctions between the creative flux of experience and the spatialized abstraction of time. Each of 'the moments of our life ... is a kind of creation', Bergson had argued.⁷ Time could not be taken as incidental to the process of creative emergence, as an empty interval whose length could be measured independent of what was being made within it. Rather, he suggested, 'the time taken up by the invention is one with the invention itself'.⁸

It is well known that Bergson had explicitly opposed these observations concerning durative time to the image of the early 'cinematographic' apparatus unrolling discrete and measured instants with no more than the illusion of continuity.⁹ Meanwhile, recent work in film studies has also characterized Bergson's interest in time and freedom itself as a symptom of time horizons prevailing in the urban modernity of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe.¹⁰ How then might we think through the

1 Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

2 Mary Ann Doane, '(De)realizing cinematic time', in Atom Egoyan and Ian Balfour (eds), *Subtitles: on the Foreignness of Film* (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 2004), p. 272.

3 Ibid., p. 281.

4 Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, p. 230.

5 See Paola Marrati, *Gilles Deleuze: Cinema and Philosophy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

6 André Bazin, 'The ontology of the photographic image', in *What is Cinema*, Volume I, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967), p. 97.

7 Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (New York, NY: Cosimo Classics, 2005), p. 9.

8 Ibid., p. 370.

9 Ibid., pp. 330–43.

10 See, for example, Bliss Chua Lim, *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

11 Ibid., pp. 43–95.

12 Michel Foucault, 'What is enlightenment?', in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (New York, NY: New Press, 1997), p. 315.

13 On the historical ontology of the ethical self in south India, see my 'Interior horizons: an ethical space of selfhood in South India', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 16, no. 1 (2010), pp. 64–83. For an ethnography of self-constitution among reality video cameramen, see Vicki Mayer, 'Guys gone wild? Soft-core video professionalism and new realities in television production', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 47, no. 2 (2008), pp. 97–116.

14 Bazin, 'The ontology of the photographic image', p. 97.

15 Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 106.

16 For a useful overview, see Janet Staiger, 'Authorship approaches', in David Gerstner and Janet Staiger (eds), *Authorship and Film* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003).

17 André Bazin, 'De la politique des auteurs', in Barry Keith Grant (ed.), *Auteurs and Authorship: a Film Reader* (London: Blackwell, 2008).

18 See Hortense Powdermaker's groundbreaking *Hollywood: the Dream Factory* (New York, NY: Arno Press, 1950); John T. Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Vicki Mayer, John Caldwell, and Miranda Banks (eds), *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009); Tejaswini Ganti, *Producing Bollywood* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming).

relationship between the 'historical' and the 'ontological' – to use a pair of terms usefully put forward recently by Bliss Cua Lim – in the cinematic conveyance of time?¹¹

What I pursue in this essay is less a juxtaposition of the historical and the ontological as disjunctive problems and domains and more an interweaving of these terms, through a pursuit of what might be called the 'historical ontology' of cinematic images. I borrow this method from Michel Foucault, who described its concern in the following manner: 'In what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints?'¹² While Foucault was concerned here with the ethical practices through which the exercise of selfhood may be taken up as a pursuit of freedom, I suggest that a similar orientation may guide our enquiries into the temporal life and death of the cinematic image.¹³ To grapple most effectively with the paradox of cinema as 'change mummified' – in Bazin's memorable phrase – we may turn our attention from the afterlife of mummified images, so to speak, to the living history of their mummification.¹⁴ With this image of a living history, I aim to draw attention to the singular and concrete circumstances through which, as anthropologist Kathleen Stewart puts it, 'things turn out to be not what you thought they were' – a mode of attending to the quotidian nature of things as a matter of ongoing and incessant transformation.¹⁵

Historical ontology seeks such difference in the fine grain of intimate experience: in the ethical, affective and aesthetic texture of relations with oneself and others. The approach I pursue here therefore deviates from the focus on the productive force of various social, cultural, political and economic structures in many studies of cinematic creation.¹⁶ The figure of the filmmaker as auteur may now appear as an artefact of modernist convention, humanist nostalgia or clever marketing on the part of studio executives and distributors. But while the making of film may no longer seem to reflect ineffable genius – unless one is concerned with the 'genius of the system'¹⁷ – the question of newness and its cinematic elaboration remains a problem worthy of confrontation.

When acts of filmmaking are presented as the outgrowth of structural forces, material conditions or craft conventions, the fact of creation itself is threatened with occlusion: not whether there is in fact something new about a particular film or filmmaker, but how – given that the creation of some form, feeling or mode of life is the inescapable concomitant of any exercise of perception and action – such newness comes to appear in the midst of a directed process of production. It is with an eye to such emergence that I follow a specifically ethnographic endeavour in historico-ontological work, attending to the singular practices, unanticipated circumstances and constitutive accidents through which film images gain their form.¹⁸

Recent anthropological work on creativity has refocused attention on processes of improvisation inhering in 'the onward propulsion of life', through which 'the mind's creativity is inseparable from that of the total

19 Tim Ingold and Elizabeth Hallam, 'Creativity and cultural improvisation: an introduction', in Tim Ingold and Elizabeth Hallam (eds), *Creativity and Cultural Improvisation* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), pp. 3, 9.

20 On ethnography as encounter, see John Borneman and Abdellah Hammoudi (eds), *Being There: the Fieldwork Encounter and the Making of Truth* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009).

21 On the optative horizons of anthropological imagination, see Vincent Crapanzano, *Imaginative Horizons: an Essay in Literary-Philosophical Anthropology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

22 See Paul Rabinow, George Marcus, James Faubion and Tobias Rees, *Designs for an Anthropology of the Contemporary* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

23 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: the Movement-Image* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) and *Cinema 2: the Time-Image* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

24 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 280.

25 D. N. Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 17.

26 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 153.

matrix of relations in which it is embedded and into which it extends'.¹⁹ In what follows, I hope to show that ethnographic fieldwork with filmmakers in the act of filmmaking offers an especially effective means of engaging the emergence of cinema in an open-ended durative time: the accidental happening of cinema is best grasped, that is, through the incidental happening of ethnographic encounter.²⁰

Situating oneself within the time and space of production allows for the deepest exposure to the temporal duration of filmic creation; to the unpredictable yet effective interplay of multiple elements, accidents and intentions traversing any clear line that may be drawn between the makers of film and the milieu in which their making takes place. It is through a practice of ethnographic immersion in and with the emergence of cinema, in other words, that the present comes to appear most clearly and subtly as a creative temporal horizon.²¹ What I intend to convey in this essay are the possibilities of ethnographic method as a means of confronting the temporal genesis and life of the cinematic image. Rather than taking anthropology as necessarily committed to the anachronistic and allochronic – a reputation still widely borne by the discipline – I explore cinematic practices of emergence as essential elements of what has been described more recently as an 'anthropology of the contemporary'.²²

It is worth marking at the outset, however, that the arguments developed here also bear a certain significance for contemporary concerns in film philosophy – most specifically in relation to the pair of books written on the cinema by Deleuze.²³ In the same way that Deleuze sought to reveal Bergsonian potentials in the cinematic image that had been neglected by Bergson himself, I hope here to convey a series of Bergsonian potentials in the process of filmmaking neglected in turn by Deleuze. Consider the following passage that appears towards the end of *Cinema 2*: 'The great cinema authors are like the great painters or the great musicians: it is they who talk best about what they do. But, in talking, they become something else, they become philosophers or theoreticians.'²⁴ In modern cinema's expression of time, Deleuze found a means of thinking through the emergent potential of thought itself. As D. N. Rodowick elaborates: 'for Deleuze, the cinema of time produces an image of thought as a non-totalizable process and a sense of history as unpredictable change'.²⁵ There is a close relationship here between the becoming-otherwise of thought and the potential for becoming-otherwise borne by the cinematic image of time. At stake for Deleuze in both of these instances is the substitution of one kind of formula for another: from 'Ego = Ego' as a law of identity to 'I is another' as a process of creative and emergent displacement.²⁶ But in what ways might it matter that that this argument is made most explicitly in *Cinema 2* in relation to the work of an anthropologist and ethnographic filmmaker, Jean Rouch?

What is most intriguing about Deleuze's engagement with Rouch is its blurring of the line between the filmic and the profilmic. 'If the real-fictional alternative is so completely surpassed it is because the camera, instead of

27 Ibid., p. 152.

28 Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p. 59.

29 Claude Levi-Strauss, 'Jean-Jacques Rousseau, founder of the sciences of man', *Structural Anthropology*, Volume II (London: Allen Lane, 1976), pp. 33–43.

30 Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind: an Introduction to Metaphysics* (New York, NY: Dover, 2007), p. 7.

31 This essay arises from a larger project concerning the productive experience of producers, directors, actors and actresses, cinematographers, editors, art and music directors and other film technicians in Tamil cinema. While I focus here on the milieu of directing on location, other directorial practices such as scripting, location scouting, casting, editing and scoring are engaged elsewhere.

marking out a fictional or real present, constantly reattaches the character to the before and after which constitute a direct time-image', he writes, proposing the continual becoming of character and filmmaker alike.²⁷ One might argue that this contamination of the filmic by the profilmic – here, the image by what precedes and succeeds it – is one of the central concerns of Deleuze's work on the cinema. After all, it is precisely this that the time-image in cinema, like Bergson's philosophy, helps us to see: 'the universe as cinema in itself, a metacinema'.²⁸ But because Deleuze relies entirely upon first-person narratives, critical reviews and his own film readings to elicit this potential from cinema, it would appear that he is forced to fall back upon the authority of those 'who talk best about what they do': the avant-garde films and discourse of a few 'great cinema authors'. The formula 'Ego = Ego' surreptitiously returns through the back door.

This essay is motivated by a similar interest in the creative potential of 'I is another' – it is no coincidence that Claude Levi-Strauss borrowed precisely the same formula from Rimbaud in order to characterize the work of anthropology.²⁹ However, a more fully ethnographic encounter with the making of film offers a compelling means of confronting not only the creative emergence of cinema in time, but also the potential of cinema to reveal time itself as a flow of creative emergence. Bergson had described the experience of intuition – a vision of reality itself as 'unceasing duration, the uninterrupted up-surge of novelty' – as essential to the work of any artist.³⁰ I hope to convey the significance of such perception not only for the making of cinema but also for our thought of what it makes possible. What might we come to see as we traverse the zone of indistinction between the filmic and profilmic? What if the practice of filmmaking itself – irrespective of the distinctiveness or status of its authors – expressed not the purity of its makers' intentions but instead the immanent potential of the situations in which these images arise? Does the cinema's revelation of time in its flux depend upon the immersion of its makers in the experience of such a time themselves? It is with these questions in mind that I turn now to the temporal thought and practice of one south Indian film director.³¹

The character Sasha first appears in the Tamil film *Billa* (Vishnu Vardhan, 2007) as a figure gliding across the screen with stylized grace. Action is essential to this gangster film set in contemporary Kuala Lumpur, and within a few minutes of Sasha's first appearance we see that she intends one act in particular: murdering the don after whom the film itself is named. In the fluid movement of acting bodies, camera angles and soundtrack rhythms leading up to her murder attempt, however, one sequence stands out for the languid quality of its pacing: the camera slows for a series of shots that reveal first a bundle of yellow flowers carefully laid onto two grey marble slabs, then the wide graveyard where these slabs are found, then the faces commemorated by these graves, and finally the figure of Sasha standing before them. Two brief flashbacks in black

32 Pradeep Sebastian, 'Beyond old Kollywood', *The Hindu Magazine*, 13 January 2008.

and white disclose the relationship between the heroine and the dead pair – both slain by the gangster Billa – and as our gaze returns to the image of Sasha before the marbled graves, we see these slabs and their flower bundles reflected in the dark of her mirrored sunglasses. As the camera closes in on Sasha's face, the sounds of recollected laughter gradually gain a tinny echo, as if cast from within a deep well. The depths that we find reflected in her mirrored frames are temporal rather than spatial, redoubling her present with living reverberations of the past. It is in the lingering depths of this temporal span that we find this character becoming something different: a would-be assassin bent on revenge. But how did this cinematic image of a creative time itself emerge?

A review article published in *The Hindu* newspaper identified *Billa* director Vishnu Vardhan as one among a number of young directors making a 'new wave' in Tamil film by fusing 'the energy and entertainment of a mainstream film ... with the complexity and sensitivity of an art film'.³² *Billa* was one of two films directed by Vishnu Vardhan whose shooting I encountered in the summers of 2007 and 2008 during five weeks of ethnographic fieldwork. Striking out as an independent filmmaker in 2003, Vishnu told me, the first question he found himself confronting was 'What am I?' He often spoke to me of filmmaking as a means of personal expression: 'it's a medium, it's a platform, it's like a stage, you come up and say what you want'. In the many conversations that we had on breaks between shots, he would describe what had just happened in the first person, as though the mass of bodies, cables, props and tools at work in these situations had been orchestrated as a means of realizing his own personal intentions; as he once said, 'everything is from your own system'. And yet, at the same time, Vishnu also admitted that he had a 'problem' with such words themselves: he often did not know what he was saying, or where these words would lead as he spoke them. In the same way, in working with Vishnu I saw that the unfolding of his work in time also routinely exceeded his intentions, an excess that was not incidental but rather essential to the very mode of his directing.

The kernel of this essay appeared suddenly in the form of a three-minute exchange during the shooting of the graveyard sequence described above, an exchange about time that closely anticipated – in a way that I could not have foreseen – the very experience of time put forward by the cinematic scene itself. The shots of Sasha mourning before a pair of gravestones were composed on a humid summer's day in Kuala Lumpur in June 2007. Nearly six hours were spent that day at a mosquito-ridden graveyard on the outskirts of the city, staging, framing and exposing these shots. Cameraman, art director, assistants and crew worked hour after hour to shift cranes, tracks and cameras, arrange lights, lay out electrical lines, and touch up the colour and texture of the graves themselves, while Vishnu paid close attention to the look of the gravestones and the layout of the frames within the cameraman's viewfinder (figure 1). Here, as was usually the case on Vishnu's shoots, individual shots were blocked and composed on the spot, each leading

Fig. 1. *Billa* (Vishnu Vardhan, 2007) graveyard scene: screenshot of Sasha (Nayantara), and the director observing the tracking camera.



into the next through the rhythms of anticipation and satisfaction, enthusiasm and discontent. Meanwhile, it was my fourth day in Kuala Lumpur, and I was struggling with the swarms of mosquitoes and the heavy afternoon heat. As the cameraman coordinated the setup of one of these shots, I asked Vishnu how he coped with the enormous amount of time and struggle it took to create what would amount to no more than a few seconds of the film. 'It's simple', he replied. 'I'm traveling in reel time.'

I was startled by this evocation of a temporal span other than the 'real' time we were apparently sharing in our conversation, and asked him what he meant. He replied that he was always in reel time, whether or not he was shooting, even when he was asleep. Inhabiting this other time, he had not felt at all the long and difficult passage of hours that I had experienced: 'Those four seconds of shots, it is that moment that you're living in. That moment. By the time it's lunch break, fuck! Lunch break and by the time you go, and fuck! It's evening already. You travel in that thing actually. You won't know actually that the time is just flying.'

Vishnu admitted that he had to make it a habit of just looking at his watch to know the actual time. He admitted too that his experience of 'reel time' posed certain challenges in the way that he encountered and engaged other people: 'When I am talking, even when I am talking to my ADs [Assistant Directors] also, suddenly I will go somewhere else. I won't know where I am.' This living in a different time and space seemed essential to his work as a director: 'I have to be there. It's another experience when you just. ... When you are just there. You are there in that space. You are just looking around, no? Fuck! This is what I am going to shoot. And this is what is going to be in the film. Capturing that moment, no?' To travel in reel time was to allow one's own experience to assume the tangible qualities conveyed by the physical medium of the film reel, to lose oneself to the time and space being conjured onscreen. Here was a filmmaker describing his own experience of Bergsonian duration.

While shooting film, Vishnu had no choice but to work within multiple and layered temporal horizons: the rational abstractions of clock schedules and hourly shifts in relation to which labour and equipment contracts were organized; the sacred time of auspicious and inauspicious moments around which the inception and conclusion of work was oriented; the inexorable passage of the sun through a productive milieu oriented largely

around the play of available light; and the time of repetition that animated the pursuit of adequate rehearsals and takes. But working with generous backing from a London-based Tamil corporate entertainment house, Vishnu also had the freedom to engage these diverse horizons from the standpoint of the cinematic reel time he was unraveling, a term that he and other filmmakers typically used to discuss the span of film – ‘two minutes, 400 feet’ – it would take to present a particular shot or scene. What was at stake in his depiction of this unfurling time as a moment in which one could lose oneself? What was it to ‘travel’ in such a time; to take, that is, the projected time of cinema as an open duration within which one could move and create as a living being?

We may find evidence here of modern cinema’s ongoing affair with contingency, the attractive immediacy of the ‘moment’ in the midst of a fleeting and ephemeral rush of experience.³³ Alternatively, one might seek out reverberations here of specifically Indian philosophies of time, the continued salience of insights presented in classical texts such as the *Yoga-Bhāṣya*: ‘the whole universe undergoes change in a single moment’.³⁴ Or, to resist attributing this temporal experience either to the ‘modern’ as such, or to the persistence of vernacular cultural forms, one might find here an instance of the more particular ‘now’ engaged by third-world filmmakers in a postcolonial milieu.³⁵ Scholarship on Indian film has focused for the most part on the ideological constitution of national and postcolonial subjects through the operation of representational narratives, codes, structures and meanings. But I want to suggest that we may do more with Vishnu’s experience of time than to establish its historical, geographic and cultural location or context.³⁶ Like many contemporary Indian directors, his self-described influences were global in their scope, including figures as diverse as Akira Kurosawa, Martin Scorsese, Guy Ritchie and a few ‘Korean’ filmmakers. If there was a ‘culture’ of time at stake here, in other words, it might simply be that of contemporary filmmaking. To propose this possibility is also to suggest that we may find broader textures of experience at work in Vishnu’s filmic thoughts and practices, pertaining to processes of creative and cinematic expression as such.

The ‘moment’ that Vishnu found himself within was not an instant that one could capture and fix all at once in the manner of a snapshot, but rather a temporal horizon in motion that invited the transformation and displacement of those who moved along with its vicissitudes. He had said in the midst of the graveyard shoot that he would often stumble (‘Fuck!’) into an unforeseen situation that would become the milieu of the film itself. Vishnu’s image of reel time suggests that to make a film is to inhabit a time of emergence, and that to live in such a milieu as director is to open oneself to what it might yet become as it is filmed: to move along with the flow of its emergent potential. By thinking with this image of experience, we may therefore find a way of further approaching what I described earlier in this essay as the historical ontology of cinematic images. ‘Each one of us ... is nothing but an assemblage of three images, a consolidate of

33 Leo Charney, ‘In a moment: film and the philosophy of modernity’, in Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz (eds), *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 279–96.

34 Anindita Niyogi Balslev, *A Study of Time in Indian Philosophy* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1999), p. 50.

35 See Lim, *Translating Time*. I describe the cultural life of filmic fragments in the Indian postcolonial present in my *Crooked Stalks: Cultivating Virtue in South India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

36 To attribute temporality in Indian cinema to ‘the cyclical temporal worldview of Hinduism’ – as does David Martin-Jones in ‘Toward another “-image”’: Deleuze, narrative time and popular Indian cinema’, *Deleuze Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2008), p. 35 – is to generalize precariously at the level of both Indian culture and its associated cinematic forms.

37 Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p. 66; Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 2004).

38 On the notion of *sarvam anityam* – ‘all is impermanent’ – in Indian Buddhism, see Balslev, *A Study of Time in Indian Philosophy*, p. xi.

39 In a notoriously dangerous practice, glass-studded strings are used in kite-fighting competitions in many Indian cities, with rivals seeking to cut away the flying kites of others.

perception-images, action-images and affection-images’, writes Deleuze, elaborating on a trinity of terms that Bergson put forward to articulate a temporal ontology of matter and image.³⁷ In what follows, I will borrow these terms – perception, action and affection – to describe three domains of experience through which directing might be seen to become expressive in its nature: three ways in which time opens as a conduit for the emergence of the cinematic image. In each case, I begin with an image from Vishnu’s films and then work back towards its conditions of possibility, the empirical and temporal circumstances that invest such images with expressive form.

Accidental happenings in time are essential to the unfolding of *Sarvam/ Everything* (2009), Vishnu Vardhan’s most recent film. ‘Everything is very happy, and *dabbak!* The girl dies’, he explained, describing a pivotal event halfway through the film that transforms it from a light-hearted romance into a dark and sombre thriller.³⁸ This death is the unexpected outcome of a bicycle race between lovers Karthik and Sandhya, playfully waged with a borrowed pair of children’s bicycles. Looking backward as they wobble along on these diminutive wheels, the camera presents a series of quick impressions of their avid and laughing faces; not once does the camera look forward along the road from the point of view of the racers themselves. Only we can see what they have failed to notice in the intensity of their chase: a red kite fluttering across the full frame of the screen, trailing the glass-studded string with which it is caught up on a roadside lamppost.³⁹ The kite registers its actuality with lethal force, whipping around the neck of the heroine to deal a sudden wound she will not survive. And yet there is also a virtual quality to our cinematic perception of this object, as a series of previously glimpsed elements – the striped retaining wall along which they race, the lampposts under which they pass, and above all the kite itself as it drifts to rest above this road in an earlier scene – leads us to anticipate the kite’s eventual return. The scene stages a contrast between ordinary perception, limited in its duration and scope, and a more expansive perception made possible through cinema. We see the emergence in time of an event neither seen nor foreseen by its subjects.

The scene of the tragic bicycle race was shot over two days on a wide road fronting Eliot’s Beach in southern Chennai in August 2008 (figure 2). The question of anticipation surfaced in discussions between Vishnu and his cameraman Nirav Shah on the first morning of the shoot: should the actress playing Sandhya lightly kiss Karthik’s cheek and say ‘goodbye’ before taking up her cycle, for example, leaving the latter and the audience to puzzle why? Although no such exchange ultimately appears in the film, I was struck by the extent to which Vishnu’s own perception of the ordinary environment surrounding us had been overtaken by the virtual horizons of cinematic perception they were in the process of staging here. Some of the first shots that morning, for example,

Fig. 2. *Sarvam* (Vishnu Vardhan, 2008) kite scene: screenshot, and actor facing away from cycle-mounted camera.



were framed against the high striped wall dividing the road from sand and sea, as the lovers negotiated with a pair of children to borrow the bicycles for their ill-fated race. As the crew worked to dismantle a crane and move lights and reflectors between two shots composed beside this wall, I caught a sudden and vivid glimpse of how thoroughly Vishnu had come to inhabit the world that was being crafted for this scene. The director was looking at Karthik's car, parked beside the pair of children's bicycles. When an assistant carefully carried a piece of equipment past this car, cutting briefly across Vishnu's field of vision, he provoked a sudden and angry outburst: 'Come man, to the outside, just standing in the frame [like that]!' the director exclaimed. The assistant was startled, as was I. Vishnu was a genial and playful presence on his sets, and the sudden anger in his voice was a surprising eruption. It was always the case that those who stumble into the visual field of a positioned camera risk the ire of director and cinematographer, but here no such shot was as yet established on the scene. Vishnu appeared to be seeing something else altogether – the frame of a shot yet in the making – attesting to the ways in which the ordinary span of his perception had been extended by the process of shooting film.

'The cinematographic character of our knowledge of things is due to the kaleidoscopic character of our adaptation to them', Bergson wrote. We ordinarily perceive the world through a discontinuous series of snapshot impressions because our action in the world is itself necessarily discontinuous in its nature.⁴⁰ Perception, that is, may be taken as nothing more than the virtual action of the body on things, its selective and subtractive quality indebted to the instrumental orientation of our deeds.⁴¹ 'But now and then', Bergson also observed, 'men arise whose senses or whose consciousness are less adherent to life. Nature has forgotten to attach their faculty of perceiving to their faculty of acting.'⁴² Identifying these figures as artists, he argued that the works of their vision showed that 'an extension of the faculties of perceiving is possible'.⁴³ The virtual horizons of their perception, in other words, promised to reveal the real depth of time in its continuous flux, which we tended otherwise to miss. While Bergson looked to philosophy for a means of extending universally such 'satisfactions which art will never give save to those favoured by nature and fortune', philosophy itself has since turned towards the cinema for a creative extension of ordinary perception.⁴⁴ Such potential cannot be expressed by the filmic course of cinema without its expression in the situation of filmmaking.

⁴⁰ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p. 333.

⁴¹ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 58.

⁴² Bergson, *Creative Mind*, p. 114.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

45 On *auteur*ity as a cultural formation, see James Naremore, 'Auteurship', in Toby Miller (ed.), *A Companion to Film Theory* (London: Blackwell, 1999).

46 For an account of contemporary film culture in the south Indian city of Chennai, see Laliitha Gopalan, 'Film culture in Chennai', *Film Quarterly* vol. 62, no. 1 (2008), pp. 40–45.

In the Tamil popular film industry of south India, a 'culture' of directors as auteurs emerged alongside the waning dominance of studio production houses in the 1970s.⁴⁵ While film in Tamil and other south Indian languages sustains wildly popular and abiding cults around the signature personality of particular stars, senior Tamil directors such as K. Balachander, Bharathiraja and Mani Ratnam are widely recognized by industry peers, reviewers and critics, and public audiences alike as bearers of distinctive vision and influential style, hailed routinely as *kalai brahmakkal* or 'creator-gods of the arts'.⁴⁶ This image of the director as a creative artist is supported not only by diverse forms of print and televisual media but also by customary practices of film production in the region. Tamil directors often exercise singular influence over their films, typically composing the stories and screenplays they direct but also at times wielding the camera, assuming central acting roles, collaborating on music and editing, or producing the films. On location they are shielded from the sun by umbrellas, cooled by standing fans and plied with constant rounds of fruit juice, exotic teas and favoured snacks by production assistants, as if to annul the distractions of the body. Assistant directors bearing mobile phones, laptops, notepads, cigarettes and other accessories are expected to respond instantly to any improvisational urges on the part of their directors.

One may find in all of this further evidence of the forms of hierarchy that have long been imagined as pernicious and pervasive in Indian social life. What I seek to emphasize here, however, is the significance of such practices for the experiential texture of the films they yield. The break from the staccato demands of active life effected by the milieu of shooting sustains the modes of virtual perception through which these films are gradually invested with their own capacity to extend the horizons of ordinary perception. I was sometimes reminded forcefully of this myself, as an ethnographer and an intermittent force of perceptual distraction on Vishnu's sets. One day during the shooting of *Billa*, for example, at a lorry repair yard in Kuala Lumpur I found Vishnu sitting quietly alone at several points during the complicated shoot. When I tried to turn one of these instances of apparent relaxation into an occasion for a question, Vishnu gently warded me off. 'Not now', he said, pointing to his own head to explain. 'I'm letting it wander.'

I would come to learn that what Vishnu saw in such moments was the narrative flow of an incipient film that slowly coalesced through the accumulation of isolated shots. 'The film is running through me', he said, describing how *Sarvam* had seized his imagination even while he was working on *Billa*. 'I have been living with it for two years.' But more subtly as well, this image of a moving film gestures towards the temporal depth of the cinematic frame itself, as it is imagined, perceived and realized in the midst of a shoot. Certainly, framing was an act of selective perception in support of action. 'I am looking only at what is in the frame', Vishnu said one afternoon, explaining how he filtered out the bustle and chaos of those working around him on a shoot. And yet I came to see that

this moment of which he spoke extended far beyond its instantaneous actualization in the bodies, tools and location working to make it present.

We were chatting that afternoon on the balcony of his hotel room high in the south Indian hills of Munnar, the day before another shooting schedule for *Sarvam* was due to start. Vishnu gestured with his hands towards a stand of tall eucalyptus trees rising before us, cutting vertically through the sight of a hillside covered with tea estates and low buildings in the distance. 'When you look here, I almost see this frame like this. With just this half branch inside, this is the full thing, and just a little on the right edge of the frame. Now this is the frame for me. It's like that. That's how it is.' His language that day underscored the static fixity of the frame through which he saw this quotidian landscape, as if it were the photographic record of an instant. But when he spoke of similar matters in the midst of an ongoing shoot, the contours of the frame were far more elusive. Working from shot to shot, he suggested on another occasion – during a break in the shooting of a song sequence for *Sarvam* – he had come to anticipate and even perceive those that would eventually follow beyond successive cuts. 'In one frame you actually see another frame ... another frame of the same thing, another perspective of the same thing.' This was a matter not only of how these shots appeared on location, and how they would look as an edited course of film, but also how they would appear on a movie hall projection screen. 'That's what is in your head.' To live with a film in the midst of its fashioning was to perceive, even in this present of discontinuous takes, the virtual horizons of a whole world. 'It becomes like a habit, actually.'

Like the potential frame that he alone had seen at Eliot's Beach, this visceral embodiment of a more creative perceptual faculty was more clearly evident in what Vishnu did than in what he said. On location for *Sarvam*, he would enact its scenes each day with his own body, working out, take by take, the movements that he envisioned for his actors. And pacing about restlessly as equipment was shifted and rearranged between successive shots, Vishnu would often stop to crouch and compose his own body in the manner of an imagined camera, framing a potential visual field through the stasis and movement of his own arms and hands (figure 3).⁴⁷ Did such gestures represent a subjective and personal appropriation of cinematic vision, or the loss of oneself to a 'cine-eye' lodged within the impersonal substance of matter itself?⁴⁸ With Vishnu, I saw that these gestures were exploratory rather than imperative in character, often sustaining questions posed to the viewpoint of others – 'See if this would look good?' – rather than the authority of his own singular vision. They may be taken, that is, to prepare a field of action whose potential movements extended far beyond the person of the director. With this observation in mind, Let us turn to the forms of temporal openness at play in directed action.

47 On such gestures as modes of coordinating action, see Emmanuel Grimaud, 'The film in hand: modes of coordination and assisted virtuosity in the Bombay film studios', *Qualitative Sociology Review*, vol. 3, no. 3 (2007).

48 On Dziga Vertov's 'eye of matter', see Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p. 81.

Fig. 3. *Sarvam*: Camera facing actor, and the director 'becoming camera' in virtual perception.



Vishnu Vardhan's 2007 *Billa* was a gangster film that remade an immensely popular 1980 Tamil film of the same title, directed by R. Krishnamurthy. The starring hero in each of these films plays a double role: first the glamorous and cosmopolitan gangster David Billa, and then the ordinary local man who is hired and trained by the police to impersonate the don and infiltrate his gang when, unbeknownst to its members, Billa dies. The plot fits the 'situation – action – modified situation' scheme that Deleuze offers as a formula for the movement of the 'action-image' in cinema: in Vishnu's film, petty pickpocket Velu finds himself thrown into the milieu of an encompassing situation, that of the gangsters, where he must 'raise his mode of being to the demands of the milieu' so that he may overturn it altogether.⁴⁹ Stylized scenes of preparatory target practice and physical training foreshadow the 'possible action' he will exercise. However, Velu first infiltrates Billa's gang in a much more subtle manner, slipping along an audiovisual current into an uninterrupted flow of action and imagination. The film shifts smoothly into the third of its song sequences soon after Velu appears in Billa's garb. The gangster's former lover addresses Velu and the camera with ardent gestures of passion, the spectacular quality of the scene conveyed by white sands and blue waters, teams of breakdancers disappearing into wisps of smoke, and the image of Velu himself on a leather couch on the beach, sunglasses hiding his reaction to the spectacle. Action slips into dream: Velu need only watch coolly as the world he has entered moves as a 'wave' around him.⁵⁰

We find here a temporary suspension of possible action, the flow of the song maintaining the pure virtuality and openness of a world's activity. The narrative movement of the film expresses a tension that Bergson had sketched between two ways of conceiving action in time: 'The duration *wherein we see ourselves acting*, and in which it is useful that we should see ourselves, is a duration whose elements are dissociated and juxtaposed. The duration *wherein we act* is a duration wherein our states melt into each other.'⁵¹ For Bergson, the first of these modes of action corresponded to the discontinuous operation of the cinematographic apparatus, while the second expressed more directly the durative flow of time. In the film *Billa*, however, we find both of these modes at work simultaneously: we see Velu acting as a possible Billa by matching him up against a series of images of what the don would do; and we find Velu in the film *becoming* Billa by slipping into the flow of the world of

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 141.

⁵⁰ Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 66.

⁵¹ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, pp. 243–4.

Fig. 4. *Billa* bridge shot: screenshot, and the director/crew shooting on location.



52 On such hybrid forms, see Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 270, and David Martin-Jones, *Deleuze, Cinema and National Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

his life. In Deleuze's language, we have here a hybrid cinematic form, alternating and even confounding the distinction between movement-image and time-image.⁵² What is interesting about this form is the image of action it puts forward: activity as inactivity, as a suspension of agency in a continuous course of transformation. More importantly, when we turn to Vishnu as director of this film, we find no better image to express the paradoxical mode of his own action.

On location with Vishnu, I found that a dynamic relationship between these two modes – between the virtual action of a world and the possible action of those within it – was essential not only to the images at work in his films, but also to the way in which they were fashioned, shaping what could be captured when the director himself would call for 'action' at the outset of each take. The song sequence that stages Velu's return as Billa, for example, cuts to three brief shots panning across a white suspension bridge from far below, coming to rest on Velu's assured face and the confident poise with which his arms grasp the steel railing. I was with the crew as these shots were taken one afternoon at the Malaysian national administrative complex of Putrajaya (figure 4). Riding here with the director and cinematographer Nirav Shah, I asked why they had chosen this location. 'Very simple: it looks good', Vishnu said, to which Nirav added: 'If you want to intellectualize it, it's the seat of power: Billa should be here'. Nirav smiled broadly as he said this, and Vishnu, delighted with the thought, held out his hand for a low-five.

Although these comments could be taken as a forecast of possible and intended action, I encountered the limits of their power as the shoot itself unfolded. The specific spot below the bridge from which these and several other shots were taken, for example, was found only by accident that afternoon as Vishnu took a quick walk with his assistant director Gokul, scouting locations for another montage sequence for the film: 'When I went there I was walking. Something told me ... "OK", I said, "I'll just take a walk". I walked out, I saw something strike. I walked down, I don't know how I went there, I just went down, I said "Fuck!" Suddenly, there you go, "Holy shit, look at this! It can happen here." We move in there.' Shifting register from the playful declaration of intentions that he and Nirav had made earlier, Vishnu spoke of this moment as though this possibility for action had erupted from the place itself. He was, I found, deeply open to such encounters with an active world. Time and again,

Vishnu returned to one expression to make sense of this manner of work and life: 'Go with the flow'.

We spoke more about this phrase beside another bridge that night, waiting for the lighting crew to set up equipment for a night chase sequence. 'Go with the flow of your thinking process', he explained: 'You thought of something. You can shoot it. Do it.' At first I took him to be talking about an imagined act that somehow had to be actualized in the environment of the shoot, and I asked how he would reconcile this flow of his thought with the flow of filmmaking circumstance. But Vishnu resisted the dualism of my question, insisting that there was only a single continuous flow of thought, action and reaction at stake here: 'When you come there, the whole place is giving you another idea altogether. You don't cut that flow.' I found his language fascinating, not only in its apparent defiance of the piecemeal fashion in which he was eliciting action himself here – 'Don't cut ... Don't stop' – but also in its embodiment of the very current he was describing: 'My whole flow is ... like a stream, you just go, you just go with it, you know. You just go with the flow. Either you flow with the location, or you flow with the nature, or you let everything blend together and you just ... It's like a gushing thing, it's not like a planned thing, no, you just gush along, you just go.' What was at stake in avidly expressing a mode of acting *with* the world so antithetical to the image of the director as an orchestrator of possible action *on* the world?

The familiar English cliché that Vishnu could not avoid expressing may perhaps be indebted to the popularization of East Asian Zen and Taoist philosophy among diverse western-educated, English-speaking peoples in the 1960s. Consider, for example, the 'temporal flow' of the tea ceremony in Japanese Buddhism, in which 'each act wholly fills the present, yet must at the same time dissolve and give way to the next'.⁵³ I do not wish, however, to characterize this orientation as an outgrowth of a specifically Asian or Indian philosophy, but instead more simply as a way of relating oneself to the emergent potential of time. Bergson calls this orientation 'intuition': a mode of action – a 'laborious, even painful, effort' – through which thought might bend itself towards the continuous flux of indefinite states that he associated with durative time.⁵⁴ Bergson's interest in 'supple, mobile, and almost fluid representations, always ready to mould themselves on the fleeting forms of intuition' bears a striking resemblance to way in which Vishnu sought as a filmmaker to relate himself to the world in which he was working: 'No matter whatever happens, no matter if everything goes wrong, you make sure that nothing stops'. Here was a practice of directing aimed not at mastering the situation to suit one's intended action, but instead towards finding a means of expression within the flow of its social, technical and natural contingencies.

Directing on location always brings into play a diverse field of unpredictable circumstances: the vagaries of weather, crowds and permits in outdoor locations; the challenges of coordinating and sustaining disparate bodies of creative, technical and support staff; the essential unpredictability

⁵³ Dennis Hirota, *The Wind in the Pines: Classic Writings of the Way of Tea as a Buddhist Path* (Fremont, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1995), p. 25. I am grateful to Charlie Hallisey for this reference.

⁵⁴ Henri Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 32.

of the equipment itself. Like many other Indian directors, Vishnu engaged with these circumstances through a cultivated openness to their temporal flux. Take, for example, the way in which a situation was established for the shooting of one crucial scene in *Billa*: the staging by police of a fictitious arms deal, whose collapse would open the chase sequence in which the gangster meets his death. Although the director had envisioned and requested a vast factory space for the enactment of this scene, a series of verbal misunderstandings led the film's Malaysian location managers to scout and reserve a technically impossible space for the shoot. A fierce quarrel ensued, but Vishnu ultimately consented to the producer's wish to use instead a local lorry repair yard that had been offered for free by its Malaysian Tamil owners. 'That's my job – to make it look good', he resolved, and spent the night reimagining the scene with his assistant directors.

The shoot itself, a few days later, was complicated and carried on well beyond sunset. 'I'm fighting with this bugger all day', Vishnu complained, referring to the sun, the struggle arising to a great degree from the limitations of budget and the need to do as much as possible with the available light. The most elaborate aspect of the scene involved an opaque glass panel through which Billa would burst in a hidden car, scattering a phalanx of startled police officers. Here too was a problem, as one of the police officers mistook his cue, leaping away in surprise a full second before the exploding glass was supposed to have alarmed him. Because the production could afford no more than one of these elaborate setups, however, the director substituted a series of wide, mid and close shots for the single shot with which he had hoped to capture the eruption of the car and its aftermath. 'I could have made it a Bond film', Vishnu said wistfully at the end of that day, reflecting on the financial limits of the 'south Indian regional cinema' within which he worked. Nevertheless, it seemed to me that the creative potential of the action he staged arose precisely from such open-ended engagements with situations amenable to little control. There was something akin to a formula for the way that Vishnu faced these circumstances: 'What is the best I can do now? That will be running always in the mind.'

The temporal index borne by this continuous question to oneself – *now* – is crucial to my argument here. For Vishnu, as for many Indian directors, working on location was far from a matter of simply giving form to the existing intentions and ideas that one has. The situation established by the location within which Vishnu directed cannot be understood, therefore, in spatial terms alone; there was a temporal dimension essential to its openness. To 'go with the flow' – that is, to acknowledge and allow the virtual action of things upon oneself – is to submit to the unexpected forces, elements and arrangements that time may introduce at any instant. It is to recognize that one is always subject to time: if not in the contingency of an active present, then in the insistence of a memory – '*Ayyoo*, I should have done that, no ...' – that would seek always to return to what could have been done in a situation long since lost.

For Vishnu, this deference to the time in which action unfolds was essential to the experience of its creativity. Speaking of the shots from under the bridge, for example, he reflected: 'It's that moment, you know. If I thought "That is where I am going to shoot", if I had stood there [on the bridge], I wouldn't have got what I got there [below the bridge]. Understand? I definitely wouldn't have got what I got there.' In inhabiting this moment of emergence, Vishnu sought to allow himself to be moved or displaced by what erupted within it. This was an ethos reflecting both a temporal relation to the place in which one worked, and a temporal relation to one's own potential for expression. 'I feel happy when I am shooting it. That's all that matters', Vishnu said. Let us call this latter mode of relating to oneself a matter of 'affection'. It is this domain that must be further explored to grasp the temporal articulation of perception and action in the creative practice of filmmaking.

Sarvam cuts directly from the scene of Sandhya's accident to the image of her bloodied body being rushed by stretcher along a narrow hospital corridor, Karthik leaning over to assure her that she 'will be fine' as she is carried beyond a pair of glass doors. But looking back through these doors shortly afterwards, he senses that this may not be the case, as he sees a couple crumpling in grief in the distance. Everyone around him also begins to weep loudly when the doctor comes out to share the news, but he alone remains strangely composed and volubly meditative. Apparently unfeeling, Karthik is caught in a spiral of time. 'Just now *daa*', he tells his friend Krishna, 'a little while before, she was laughing happily and riding a cycle. That laughing face is still there, just like that before my eyes.' Each time Karthik looks down or away from his friend as he paces around the hospital waiting area, he turns back again to give voice to a slightly different recollection: that such a tiny string had caught around her neck ... that it was coated with glass ... that she had sped ahead on the larger cycle ... that the pair crying in the distance must be her parents ... that someone must sign for her body ... that it cannot be him as they are not yet married. Krishna finally pulls Karthik away as he keeps talking, mostly to himself, and it is only when he leans his head against a long white wall that we see and hear him break down in tears. This feeling of grief erupts almost as a surprise; as though to feel it Karthik must be reminded of what is happening at that very moment; as though it could be felt only through the return of time to itself.

It is not easy to grasp what Bergson might have meant by suggesting that we may 'place ourselves ... in the concrete flow of duration'.⁵⁵ He sought, after all, to contest the many ways in which we tend to spatialize time, to treat it as an empty interval within which thought and action takes place. What then does it mean to find oneself *in* a duration such as this:

Inner duration is the continuous life of a memory which prolongs the past into the present, the present either containing within it in a distinct form the ceaselessly growing image of the past, or, more probably,

55 Ibid., p. 36.

56 Ibid., p. 26–27.

57 Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 310

58 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 83.

59 Ibid., p. 82.

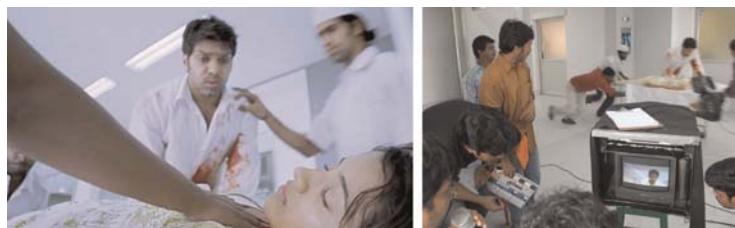
showing by its continual change of quality the heavier and still heavier load we drag behind us as we grow older.⁵⁶

We relate to ourselves, Bergson seems to suggest, through the relation of time to itself: past to present, present to past, quality to successive quality. Duration appears here, in other words, as a reflexive relation, an open-ended and transformative relation of something to itself. Another name that Bergson proposes for this kind of reflexive relationship is ‘affection’: the action of a body upon itself.⁵⁷ What we find in duration is time split against itself, acting upon itself, affecting and being affected by itself; to say that we are in time is perhaps to imply more profoundly that we *are* time, that our freedom to act otherwise amounts only to the difference that time makes to itself.⁵⁸

This affectivity of time is something that cinema can show us, Deleuze argues: ‘how we inhabit time, how we move in it, in this form which carries us away, picks us up and enlarges us’.⁵⁹ But again we may ask whether it can do so without its makers being affected themselves by the time in which they work. Take, for example, the shooting of this hospital scene from *Sarvam*. Vishnu and cinematographer Nirav speculated that it would be the most intense scene in the film. ‘They should cry’, I heard Nirav saying confidently to Vishnu as they flicked through digital stills of the completed scene two days after they had shot it. At the outset of the shoot, however, quite what the scene might make anyone feel remained unclear. Like the spiraling course of Karthik’s grief within the film, the affective power of the scene would only develop through a recursive encounter with its own unfolding.

On the first morning of the shoot, Vishnu walked me through the hospital corridors constructed by his art director on the ninth floor of an unfinished Chennai office block, the narrow passages in blinding white designed to convey the anxiety with which Karthik would rush Sandhya into the operating room. As the shoot proceeded, the director demanded feeling more than anything else from his actors. ‘Let me feel it now!’, he yelled, as the trolley raced through the narrow hallway for the first take rehearsal, camera mounted backwards to frame the hero’s panicked face. ‘Come on! Mood, mood!’, he would exclaim if the cinematographer found such feeling lacking from the standpoint of his camera lens. Accidents erupting in the midst of takes throughout the day – a glass door cracked by an errant nurse, a open doorway exposing set equipment to the frame, pieces of the stretcher-mounted camera falling away as the cart was raced along the halls, and above all emotional misfires on the part of the actors themselves – underscored the essential contingency of the enterprise. ‘We don’t even know what is going to happen ... we don’t even know how it will look’, Vishnu had told me that morning, just before they began to rehearse the first take. But crucially, he forecast as well that if he ‘felt it’ in the shots taken that day, this would come as a kind of *deja vu*: ‘when you see it, that is a feeling of watching something which you’ve seen inside’. A successful scene, in other words, would echo or revive

Fig. 5. *Sarvam* hospital scene: screenshot, and director viewing the live video feed.



something that the director – like his cinematic character – had already felt before.

Affection is essential to Indian popular cinema, which expresses and provokes felt intensities to seize and absorb the attention of its audience.⁶⁰ This glimpse of the cinematic conjuring of one such scene, however, reveals affection as an open and indeterminate horizon of expression in the present that nevertheless relies for its force upon some semblance of the past. Although this might appear to represent a contradiction, Bergson's work on time suggests that this apparent impasse depends upon the basic, and erroneous, presumption that the past must precede the present. Anomalous states of consciousness such as *deja vu*, Bergson argues, attest instead to the simultaneous coexistence of past and present: 'It is a recollection of the present moment in that actual moment itself. It is of the past in its form and of the present in its matter. It is *a memory of the present*.'⁶¹ His explication of this argument puts forward an image of time itself as twofold in nature, composed in the manner of a pair of 'jets': 'one of which falls back towards the past whilst the other springs forward towards the future'.⁶² This image offers another way of articulating the essential creativity of temporal duration: each perception of an actual present, selective and prospective in its identification of fixed objects, coincides with a virtual memory of itself as emerging from the flow of time.⁶³ Sensations of doubled consciousness such as *deja vu* make perceptible what is always invisibly the case.

What is palpably 'felt' in such sensations, in other words, is the affective intensity of a spiraling relation between the actual and the virtual, between the present and the living pasts that make it otherwise. 'When you see it, that is a feeling of watching something which you've seen inside', Vishnu reflected. 'Feeling it', for Vishnu, is a matter of affective displacement in time: the sense that one's own feelings are returning to presence in some other time and from somewhere else, an encounter with the virtual horizons of the film as they came to surface 'out really in reality'. It is essential to note that this return from elsewhere is effected both by the milieu of its making and by the screen on which it registers (figure 5). Vishnu insisted that seeing the hospital space constructed by his art director that day, for example, was not in itself sufficient for the essential feeling of *deja vu*: he was only affected by the eventual appearance of the scene within the frame of a screen.⁶⁴ 'It's like I am watching a film. The monitor is like watching a film', he said, describing

⁶⁰ See Anand Pandian, 'Landscapes of affective expression: affective encounters in South Indian cinema', *Cinema Journal*, forthcoming 2011.

⁶¹ Henri Bergson, 'Memory of the present and false recognition', in *Mind-Energy: Lectures and Essays* (New York, NY: Henry Holt, 1920), p. 167.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁶³ Keith Ansell-Pearson, 'The reality of the virtual: Bergson and Deleuze', *MLN*, vol. 120, no. 5 (2005).

⁶⁴ On the constitutive passivity of the Deleuzian spectator, see Richard Rushton, 'Deleuzian spectatorship', *Screen*, vol. 50, no. 1 (2009), p. 48.

his experience of the video feed through which the scene would first gain a form independent from him as an actual frame. Throughout the shoot, Vishnu's eyes were glued almost exclusively to this small screen as the action unfolded immediately around him. 'Wild, huh?', he asked me as we watched together an establishing shot for the entire scene framed without a hitch late that afternoon. Its affective power returned to him in the form of a surprise: 'I felt it in the first take itself'.

These feelings, always anticipated and sometimes attained, cannot be taken, therefore, as a simple external expression or realization of oneself as director, routed and refracted as they were through a complex and unpredictable apparatus of enactment. There was an essential indeterminacy to the time opened by this play of affections, an uncertainty that no amount of intentional planning and staging could overcome. Vishnu reflected: 'If it is the same dialogue, with the same emotion, with the same way he is doing, everything is the same, then it should work. But sometimes, it won't work. You won't know, something is wrong but you won't ... you can't understand what is wrong. That always happens. "It's ok, but something is ... let's do one more".' To exercise directorial judgment as a matter of affection is to submit to the contingency of time, to rely upon the temporal duration of practice for the actual emergence of something new. Each take may thus be understood as a certain kind of gamble with time, wagering the potential affective response of an eventual audience. This outcome cannot be understood or expected but only intuited, by following the play of one's own affections as they engage what appears onscreen. For the filmmaker, just as for those who confront what they have fashioned, 'a time is revealed inside the event'.⁶⁵ And like the cinema, ethnography promises us a means of its perception.

Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Le Mystère Picasso/The Picasso Mystery* (1956) presents a compelling cinematic scene of artistic creation, unfolding largely as a series of anonymous lines that extend along the surface of the screen without forecasting where they are going. André Bazin suggested that the film attested to the continuous *life* of duration: 'Each of Picasso's strokes is a creation that leads to further creation', he writes, 'not as a cause leads to an effect, but as one living thing engenders another'. Confronted by the 'pure waiting and uncertainty' with which Clouzot's work presents us, we are led to conclude that 'only film could make us see duration itself'.⁶⁶ Seen in retrospect, however, some of the most telling moments in the film are instances of *discontinuity*, such as the moment that arises when Picasso has finished one work and suggests making another, even while Clouzot tells him that he has no more than five minutes of film stock left to shoot with. Their exchange is captured by a different camera than the one that has guided our looking thus far: suddenly the men themselves, rather than the emergent strokes and works, are pictured onscreen, and they speak too of the hiatus. What will Picasso do with this

65 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 100.

66 André Bazin, 'A Bergsonian film: *The Picasso Mystery*', trans. Bert Cardullo, *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2001), pp. 2, 4.

small interval of available reel time? ‘We will see, it will be a surprise’, he promises, while Clouzot retorts with a threatened interruption of his own: ‘Just remember. If anything at all happens, you stop, and I’ll stop.’ What follows is a series of cuts back and forth between painter, canvas, director, camera and footage counter, the pace and direction differing sharply from the openness through which Picasso’s works otherwise gain form onscreen. It is as though the film cannot capture the continuity of its own happening in time.

It is precisely this limit – the point at which happening *in* film stumbles over the happening *of* film – that I have sought to engage by working ethnographically in the space and time of cinematic production. I have tracked back and forth here between emergent scenes of becoming in a pair of popular Indian films and the emergent situations from which they arise. The notion of ‘reel time’ that has oriented these scenes and situations calls our attention to the durative horizon of creative expression through which film gains its capacity – as Bazin has it – to reveal duration itself. We may therefore find a way here of grappling with a temporal conundrum that has haunted cinema almost since its inception in the early twentieth century: rolling film’s staccato presentation of an only apparently continuous reality. ‘Real time’ in cinema can only be illusory, many critics have insisted.⁶⁷ We may find, however, that this is the case only insofar as one begins one’s critical work with the ‘mummified’ body of film rather than the living process of its ‘embalmmnt’. From the standpoint of this process, film loses the clarity of its form as a fixed reel of discontinuous images, coming to appear instead as a ‘way station’ in the flux of being: a temporary point of affective resonance between the being of a maker, that of a milieu of filmmaking, and that of a film viewer.⁶⁸ Zeno’s paradox, at least in respect to cinema, finds a means of resolution here.

It is as an ethnographer that I have tried to convey the temporal texture of such experience; I too have sought fleeting resonance in time with a flux of circumstance other than my own. The disposition to time at work in this essay is therefore rather different from the orientation of certain other recent calls for more production ethnography. ‘In screen production cultures’, John Caldwell writes, for example, ‘human behaviours and personal disclosures are systematically choreographed and preemptively staged for public analysis.’⁶⁹ The difference in our respective conclusions may express differences of empirical setting, conceptual predilection or modes of ethnographic attention. In any case, it is the sense that nothing *happens* in a time of encounter – be that the encounter of filmmaker with profilmic world, or the encounter of ethnographer with a world of filmmaking – that I have sought to counter here. Through these glimpses of one director becoming otherwise – becoming character, becoming camera, becoming image, becoming world – we may glimpse how the present may be lived as a creative horizon of emergence. And as films and filmmakers alike gain unanticipated forms, the historical ontology of the cinematic image resurfaces as a historical ontology of the contemporary

67 On the ‘allure... of a mobility that is, in film, quite simply not there’, see Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, p. 205.

68 On ‘way stations’ along an unfolding line of continuous passage, see Tim Ingold, *Lines: a Brief History* (London: Routledge, 2007).

69 John Caldwell, ‘Screen studies and industrial “theorizing”’, *Screen*, vol. 50, no. 1 (2009), pp. 167–79.

70 On the metacinematic quality of contemporary life and its ethical horizons in rural south India, see my 'Cinema in the countryside: Tamil cinema and the remaking of rural life', in Velayutham (ed.), *Tamil Cinema*, pp. 124–38. On cinema and a 'livable' world, see Marrati, *Gilles Deleuze*, pp. 78–93.

self. Examining the making of cinema, we ultimately confront the cinematic nature of the present as an *ethical* question: how best to live in a world become film?⁷⁰ In attending to this time as a horizon of creative perception, action, or affection, we may come to appreciate further not only the cultural conditions of contemporary life, but also the arts of existence best suited to bending them.

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Fractured landscapes: detection, location and history in Uchida Tomu's *Kiga kaikyo/A Fugitive from the Past*

ALASTAIR PHILLIPS

The narrative of the hugely successful but critically neglected detective film *Kiga kaikyo/A Fugitive from the Past* (1965), directed by Uchida Tomu (1898–1970), traverses both time – from the late 1940s to the late 1950s – and space – from rural Northern Japan to the urban streetscapes and communities of Tokyo and the coastal port of Maizuru on the Japan Sea. Ostensibly a work of crime fiction, the film can also be read as both a consideration of the cost of postwar social transformation and the hidden legacies of the trauma of World War II. In this essay I want to examine how the film's various topographies specifically help to locate a sense of the social changes undergone by Japan in that distinctive phase between its demilitarization and renewed corporate growth. I wish in particular to redefine Martin Lefebvre's influential work on the ambiguities of the relationship between landscape and film¹ by turning to a more historicized conception of the treatment of space, time and the moving image in one specific instance of Japanese genre cinema from the mid 1960s.² My argument will rest on the implications of the fact that Uchida seems explicitly to decentre the narrative spatially so that the film's overall perspective remains firmly based in Hokkaido and the desolate region of the Shimokita peninsula of Honshu – a world away from the then rapidly transforming modernity of Tokyo. I also want to examine what happens when the film turns away from this site to portray various street scenes within both the nation's capital and the port of Maizuru on the coast of the Japan Sea. Finally, by the time the film ends, leaving the 'officescapes' of

1 Martin Lefebvre, 'Between setting and landscape in the cinema', in Martin Lefebvre (ed.), *Landscape and Film* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 19–60.

2 For a highly truncated survey of the field, see Paul Spicer, 'Japanese cinema and landscape', in Graeme Harper and Jonathan Rayner (eds), *Cinema and Landscape* (Bristol: Intellect, 2010), pp. 231–42.

late 1950s Japan and returning again to Shimokita, a new set of considerations are in play. Through these three spatial strands we may understand more closely what exactly is at stake in terms of the film's wider concerns about the national politics of loss and location.

Before turning directly to *A Fugitive from the Past*, I shall trace the broader contours of the field of Japanese crime cinema and argue that its cultural, as opposed to its geographical, landscape is as notoriously unstable as that of its US and European counterparts. In so doing, I shall propose how a number of elements related to the distinctive spatial aesthetics of Uchida's film emerge from an engagement with this fractured trajectory. The arrival of the detective story in Japan (especially in its French, US and British forms) coincided with the Meiji Era (1868–1912) and the implementation of policies designed to remodel the nation in the light of western powers. From the very beginning the power of local contexts determined the uneven vagaries of cultural flow, with phenomena including the writer Kuroiwa Ruikō (1862–1913) working on bestselling Japanese translations and reworked adaptations of his French detective fiction counterparts such as Emile Gaboriau, and the kabuki playwright Okamoto Kidō (1872–1939) refashioning Sherlock Holmes-style narratives on the streets of the old capital of Edo.³ A more indigenous tradition emerged with the publication in 1923 of Hirai Tarō's groundbreaking *Nisen Dōka/Tuppence Coin* in the influential journal, *Shin Seinen*. Hirai Tarō (1894–1965) signed his short story, 'Edogawa Ranpo', thus explicitly punning the US mystery writer Edgar Allan Poe. His move heralded a long career in an influential form of erotic and macabre detective fiction.

During the course of the early 1910s, the popularity of such French crime films as Victorin-Hyppolite Jasset's *Zigomar* (1911) led to Japanese-style versions such as *Nihon Jigomar* (produced by the Yoshizawa Company), in which the Japanese 'Zigomar' did urban battle with the redoubtable Detective Sawaguchi.⁴ But it was not until the 1920s that the detective genre became more fully established within the Japanese film industry, especially with the efforts of the contemporary film wing of the Toa Kinema company. These films established a certain kind of template that distinguished them from their more action-orientated US counterparts, entailing a labyrinthine narrative structure and a predilection for psychological conflict amongst the increasingly fragmented elements of modern-day society. These tendencies pervade *A Fugitive from the Past* in a number of ways, none more so than in terms of the film's splintered representation of time, space and historical memory.

Although the hardboiled tradition of crime fiction is nowadays extremely popular in Japan with writers such as Osawa Arimasa (1956–) and Kitakata Kenzo (1947–), its arrival also coincided with that other major convulsion in contemporary Japanese history, the American Occupation, which lasted from 1945 to 1952 and provides a significant backdrop to the central part of the narrative of *A Fugitive from the Past*. Japanese readers initially became familiar with the genre from books

3 Mark Silver, 'The detective novel's novelty: native and foreign narrative forms in Kuroiwa Ruikō's *Kettō no hate*', *Japan Forum*, vol. 16, no. 2 (2004), pp. 191–205.

4 Hiroshi Komatsu, 'Representations of the dark world in Japanese silent films', in Roberto Cueto (ed.), *Japón en Negro: Cine Policiaco Japonés* (San Sebastián: Festival Internacional de Cine de Donostia-San Sebastián, 2008), pp. 271–83; Aaron Gerow, *Visions of Japanese Modernity: Articulations of Cinema, Nation, and Spectatorship, 1895–1925* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press: 2010).

5 Kyoko Hirano, 'Japanese crime films in the 1940s and 1950s', in Cueto (ed.), *Japón en Negro*, pp. 283-97.

6 Ibid., p. 291.

7 Ibid., p. 295.

8 Daisuke Miyao, 'Dark visions of Japanese film noir: Suzuki Seijun's *Branded to Kill*', in Alastair Phillips and Julian Stringer (eds), *Japanese Cinema: Texts and Contexts* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 193-204.

published for the US military authorities. It was only in 1953 that the Hayakawa Pocket Mystery books began translating the works of such luminaries as Cornell Woolrich and Dashiell Hammett. By this time Japanese audiences had also had the chance to view a limited number of Hollywood 'dark films' such as *The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, 1941; released in 1951); *Gilda* (Charles Vidor, 1946; released in 1949) and *Laura* (Otto Preminger, 1944; released in 1947). As Kyoko Hirano has demonstrated, the climate of the postwar Japanese film industry was dominated by the regulations imposed by the Americans to the extent that the 'moral and ethical standards of the censors were [explicitly] modeled after the US Motion Picture Production Code'.⁵ So it was that *jidai geki* stars of the time such as Katakō Chiezō (previously famous for his roles in *chambara* [sword fighting films]) were forced to turn to more contemporary leading characters; in this case the figure of the Japanese private eye in a western suit, Bannai Tarao, whose appearance in *Tarao Bannai senritsu no nanakamen/The Seven Faces of Bannai Tarao* (Matsuda Sadatsugu and Kobayashi Tsuneo, 1946) launched a series of popular sequels lasting until 1960.

The reasons for the limited distribution of many key US films noirs remain open to speculation, although recent scholarship suggests that rights issues may have played their part as much as the more obvious factors relating to the need to preserve a sense of moral decency.⁶ The latter, though, must surely explain the delay in release until after the end of the American Occupation of such films as Robert Siodmak's 1946 *The Killers* and Billy Wilder's 1944 *Double Indemnity*, both held back until 1953. In due course, by the late 1950s these films had a significant, but still largely uncharted, impact on the aesthetics of Japanese crime cinema through releases such as Toshio Masuda's *Sabita knife/Rusty Knife* (1958) and Imamura Shōhei's *Hateshinaki yokubo/Endless Desire* (1958); the latter, for example, specifically citing Stanley Kubrick's *The Killing* (1957), then recently released in Japan under the morally explicit title of *Gennama ni karada o hare*, which translates as 'gamble with your own body to get cash'.⁷ As Daisuke Miyao has suggested, in relation to his case study of Suzuki Seijun's subsequent *Koroshi no rakuin/Branded to Kill* (1967), the subversive potential of US film noir continued to be recognized and appropriated partly just because of its apparently dystopian image of US mass culture – the very thing, of course, that initially aroused the ire of the military censors.⁸

A further telling example of the successful hybridization of these forms, and one that relates directly to the particular narrative organization of *A Fugitive from the Past*, is the case of the prolific crime writer Matsumoto Seichō (1909-92). Matsumoto's novels *Harikomi/The Chase* (1955) and *Zero no shōten/Zero Focus* (1959) were both filmed by one of Japan's leading crime film directors, the equally critically neglected figure of Nomura Yoshitarō (1919-2005), in 1957 and 1961 respectively. Matsumoto had already won Japan's prestigious literary award, the Akutagawa Prize, by the time he published *Ten to sen/Points and Lines* in

9 James Kirkup, obituary for Matsumoto Seichō, 12 August 1992, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-seicho-matsumoto-1539784.html>> accessed 15 March 2011.

10 Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, *Kurosawa: Film Studies and Japanese Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 320-21.

11 James Kirkup, obituary for Mizukami Tsutomu, 29 September 2004, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/tsutomu-mizukami-550559.html>> accessed 15 March 2011.

12 The first in the highly successful 'Abashiri Prison' film series, *Abashiri bangaichi/A Man From Abashiri Prison* (Ishii Teruo, 1965), was released in the same year as *Fugitive from the Past*.

1958, which itself was immediately filmed by Kobayashi Tsuneo for Toei studios. In it he constructed an elaborate and tightly woven narrative structure involving the tracking of a murder suspect who claims to have been placed miles from the scene of the crime. The title refers to the way in which crucial points in the construction of the plot were determined by the minutely organized details of Japan's railway network timetable. As James Kirkup points out, the author specifically 'employed researchers to check every last detail of railway lore ... timetable improbabilities, wrong lines, technical rolling-stock details, local geography, dialects and trades'.⁹ Matsumoto's fascination with the precisely delineated organization of national space and interest in the practicality and political necessity of navigating social landscape was particularly influential. These elements are clearly present in Uchida's film and, in turn, also likely helped shape the similar narrational dynamics of Kurosawa Akira's better-known reworking of Ed McBain's novel *King's Ransom*, *Tengoku to jigoku/High and Low*, released only two years previously in 1963. If Kurosawa's own earlier Occupation-era crime film, *Nora inu/Stray Dog* (1948), had owed much of the direct force of its representation of the city to neorealist-inspired films such as Jules Dassin's *Naked City* (released in the same year in Japan), *High and Low* instead functioned more explicitly in terms of social allegory by concentrating on a sense of the 'spatial transformation brought about by the radical socioeconomic changes of the 1960s' gained specifically through a reading of 'the surface of the cityscape [on the part of the police] as a text'.¹⁰ This explicit conjugation of place, history and detection, as I shall argue, is central to an understanding of the distinctive representational politics of *A Fugitive from the Past*.

The film was adapted from Mizukami Tsutomu's 1962 novel by the scriptwriter Suzuki Naoyuki. Brought up on the northern coastline of the Japan Sea coast, Mizukami (1919-2004), or 'Minakami' as he was also known, had wandered the country to avoid detection as a fugitive from military service in China and Manchuria during the war years. He often turned to the formative landscapes of his childhood in his later wide-ranging writings.¹¹ *Kiga kaikyō*, or *Straits of Hunger* to give it its literal and perhaps more revealing title, follows Mizukami's friend Matsumoto Seichō's influential template, whose *ten to sen* technique dictated that two apparently distinctive threads within the complex plot of the fiction would be finally resolved through the act of professional detection. The film depicts an investigation into the postwar life of Inukai Takichi (Mikuni Rentarō), a reckless criminal who flees the scene of a violent crime committed during a severe typhoon. During the course of a ferry tragedy off the coast of the northern island of Hokkaido – modeled on the real-life sinking of the passenger ferry Tōya Maru in 1954 – he apparently kills his two accomplices, two escaped convicts from Abashiri Prison.¹² On the run, now on the main island of Honshu, he spends the night with a prostitute, Yae (Hidari Sachiko), and leaves her with some of his takings – enough money to allow her to change her life and move to Tokyo.

Meanwhile Yumisaka, (Junzaburō Ban), a local police detective, dedicates himself to pursuing Inukai, but the trail runs cold after he traces Yae in the capital and she misleads him with false information. Years later Yae sees Inukai's name in a newspaper – he is now a independently wealthy man with the new name of Tarumi Kyōtarō – and she unwittingly sets about a chain of events which leads to a return journey to the northern seascapes of Japan and the criminal's eventual downfall.

Uchida's particular postwar history was complicated and he remained relatively silent about this period in his published autobiography, as Craig Watts points out in his lengthy study of Uchida's ambivalent complicity with Japanese colonial ideology.¹³ In 1943, with filmmaking becoming increasingly restricted in Japan, Uchida, along with the director Shindō Kaneto, briefly visited Manchuria in order to discuss the production of a film that would glorify the Japanese Kantōgun Tank Division; a unit that had been vital during the process of Japan's invasion and subsequent control over the territory. Watts relates how a scriptwriter who made the trip with them 'remarked on ... [Uchida's] apparent sympathy for the militarists, noting that at one point ... [Uchida actually] expressed how wonderful it would be to die for one's country'.¹⁴ Although the film was never made, due to the deteriorating war situation, the director nonetheless left Japan again in 1945, shortly before the end of conflict, to work briefly for the *Manshu Eiga Kyōkai* or *Man'ei* (Manchuria Film Association). The Association had been established in 1937 and managed from 1939 by Amakasu Masahiko, who sought to integrate the technological expertise of the German studio system (particularly UFA) with the propagandist goals of Japanese colonial ideology.¹⁵ After the defeat of the Japanese by the Soviets and the eventual reintegration of the Association under the collective control of the Chinese Communist Party, Uchida stayed on to assist in the reconstruction of the Chinese film industry. It was only during this period, Watts argues, during the course of his Maoist studies, that he came to understand fully the narrative potential of internal conflict or contradiction, to the extent that he argued that contradictions themselves were an intrinsic aspect of all human society, and that one builds upon the other up to the point of a final climactic explosion or resolution.¹⁶ With this in mind, it is therefore useful to begin to think of a significant alignment between the resolution of Uchida's experience during these years, the transitional figure of his main protagonist in *A Fugitive from the Past*, and the allegorical potential of his film in relation to a reading of consequences of Japan's wartime trauma.

It was only after the end of the American Occupation that Uchida returned to Japan – via the port city of Maizuru – to resume his filmmaking career. This is an important point: the director of *A Fugitive from the Past* would have had very little direct experience of the central timeframe that structures the film's narrative, and to this extent the film can be read as a kind of period film, or *jidai geki*, whose visual aesthetic of immediacy disguises the fact that much of the film's imagery consists of imagined recreation.¹⁷ Indeed, Uchida's critical reputation remains as an

13 Craig Watts, 'Blood Spear, Mt. Fuji: Uchida Tomu's conflicted comeback from Manchuria', *Bright Lights Film Journal*, July 2001, no. 33, <<http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/33/tomu1.php>> accessed 15 March 2011.

14 Ibid.

15 Peter B. High, *The Imperial Screen* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

16 Watts, 'Blood Spear, Mt. Fuji'.

17 I owe this point to Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano.

18 Noël Burch, *To the Distant Observer* (London: Scholar Press, 1979), p. 153.

19 Suzuki Naoyuki, *Shisetsu Uchida Tomu den* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1997), p. 333.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 334.

21 *Ibid.*, pp. 40-1, 344-5.

intelligently focused genre film director with a specialist interest in the period film. Two prewar *gendai geki* films, however, point to key elements within *A Fugitive from the Past: Keisatsukan/Police*, shot in 1933 and described by Noël Burch as ‘a perfect pastiche, well ahead of its time, of the post-war Hollywood police investigation with social overtones’,¹⁸ and *Tsuchi/Earth* (1939), a semi-documentary narrative feature filmed on location that recorded a year in the life of a peasant community living in the dramatic landscapes of Northern Japan. Later, in his better-known postwar period, Uchida’s widescreen colour film, *Mori To Mizuumi No Matsuri/The Outsiders* (1958), set amongst the indigenous Ainu people, also made similarly dramatic use of the rugged mountainscapes of Hokkaido, with the correct translation of the film’s title, ‘Festival of Lakes and Forests’, drawing attention to the key role landscape places in the film’s diegetic world.

In his published account of the gestation of *A Fugitive from the Past*, Suzuki Naoyuki recounts how he and Uchida set the film in the decade between 1947 and 1957 because they wanted ‘to portray a miniature version of Japanese society facing the utmost devastation and hunger, both physically and mentally’.¹⁹ ‘Somehow we have a habit to see things from the “centre” called Tokyo, you know’, Uchida said to Suzuki, ‘but in this scenario, I want the viewpoint to be firmly based in Hokkaido and Shimokita’.²⁰ Both men called upon autobiographical experience in their picturing of the suffering of ordinary people in this region. During the production of the film, for instance, Uchida remembered his experience of the devastation of the Great Kantō Earthquake in 1923 and how he came across his former landlord cradling the ashes of his wife and son amidst the rubble of their former home. Suzuki argues that there is an unstable echo of this moment when Detective Yumisaka picks up the ashes of the boat left by his quarry on the mountainside of the Shimokita Peninsula. Suzuki himself recalled his upbringing as the son of a Japanese detective when he inserted a sequence in the film demonstrating the unique impoverishment of Yumisaka’s family as they quarrel over their shortage of food. This moment implicitly provides the explanation for Yumisaka’s pronounced ill health in the latter sections of the film’s narrative.²¹

In echoes of the earlier production histories of several US films noirs of the 1940s, the Tokyo studios of Toei were at this time undergoing an unstable period with several changes in management and a disruptive series of labour disputes. This affected the material look of the film to the extent that an overtime ban meant there was little nighttime cinematography, although a second crucial stylistic decision – to blow the footage up from black-and-white 16mm to 35mm – was not taken out of straitened circumstances but rather from a desire to reiterate the material impoverishment visualized within the film’s actual mise-en-scene. Uchida named this the *hōshiki* or ‘W106 method’, and experimented with his colleagues, such as the esteemed cinematographer Midorikawa Michio, on how best to preserve a certain roughness to the grain of the image.

In this sense Uchida was not impervious to the dialectical aspect of the relationship between nature and the recorded image, especially when it came to the opening sections of the film shot on location in Northern Japan. Later, in his published memoirs, he wrote extensively about the tension between the will to recognize the limitations of the mediated relationship between the natural environment and the camera image and the aesthetic possibilities of harnessing these qualities for specific narrative ends. Noting that no amount of technology could ultimately preserve a film crew from the force of the natural elements on location and arguing for the direct transcription, when possible, of ‘the spacious air and the sun’, he also simultaneously commented on the fact that film, like ‘the cotton hand-woven by an artisan’ was always forced to necessarily ‘manufacture’ the ‘infinite kinds of neutral tints’ found within the sky. It was Japanese television, then coming into increased competition with the cinema industry, that was, because of technological restrictions, still unable to show the sky as it really was.²²

Another key element of the film was its pronounced temporal duration: it is just over three hours in length. For box-office reasons Toei liked to screen double bills three times a day, so following a standoff that was widely reported in the newspapers Uchida and the studio came to a compromise, with a shortened version of the film being released in contract cinemas and the full-length version being screened in cinemas directly managed by Toei.²³ Despite these travails the film was an immediate success, named fifth best film of the year by *Kinema junpō* and best film of the year by *Eiga hyōron*.²⁴ Why was the film so successful? Firstly, it is a stylistically provocative piece of work, but I also think it is important to note that the film was organized and shot during 1964 – the year of the Tokyo Olympics, during which Japan’s monumental economic recovery from the trauma of World War II was a prominent aspect of the face the country displayed to the rest of the world. In his film Uchida repeatedly shifts from positive to negative footage in order to signal some disruption to temporal continuity, just as three years later Suzuki Seijin would deploy the same device in *Koroshi no rakuin/Branded to Kill* (1967), this time specifically to evoke the dark side of Tokyo Olympics-era urban regeneration.²⁵ Rather than summoning a spatial darkness, as in the disruptive force of Suzuki’s picturing of the recesses of modern urban architecture, Uchida is here disrupting a sense of seamless continuity between the past and present in order to convey a temporally defined consideration of the cost of social transformation for mainstream Japanese culture. The film is looking back at a set of recent pasts that relate powerfully to the immediate present.

What, then, are these pasts and how do they relate in particular to the film’s representation of space and landscape? Let us look first at Lieutenant Yumisaka’s uncovering of his hypothesis of how Inukai and his fellow criminals crossed from Hokkaido to Honshu. In his groundbreaking work on cinematic landscape, Martin Lefebvre draws upon Anne Cauquelin’s writing to argue that ‘not every depiction of

²² Uchida Tomu, *Eiga kantoku 50 nen* (Tokyo: Nihon Tosho Sentā, 1999), p. 194.

²³ Uchida threatened to have his name dropped from the credits if the studio released the shortened version. See Suzuki, *Shisetsu Uchida Tomu den*, p. 362–63.

²⁴ The film also received the NHK Film Award and Uchida was named best director at the *Mainichi Eiga Konkūru* (Mainichi Film Concours).

²⁵ Miyao, ‘Dark visions of Japanese film noir’, pp. 193–204.

26 Lefebvre, 'Between setting and landscape in the cinema', p. 20 (emphasis in original).

27 Ibid., p. 21.

28 Ibid., p. 29.

29 Ibid., p. 30.

30 Ibid., p. 48.

31 P. Adams Sitney, 'Landscape in the cinema: the rhythms of the world and the camera', in Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskel (eds), *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 103–26.

exterior or natural space is a *landscape*'.²⁶ Lefebvre thus makes a fundamental distinction between what he calls 'setting' and 'landscape', where setting refers broadly to 'the space of story and event' or 'the scenery of and the theatre for what will happen'. 'Constructed by the spectator from audiovisual clues', setting cannot even 'be reduced exclusively to what is seen on screen'. It is 'an *entirely variable conceptual construction* ... compounded by the presence of duration and montage'.²⁷ In this sense, too, the critic needs to be especially attentive to the relationship between what can be observed within the frame and what may be said to lie beyond it. This is especially significant when it comes to the moving image's visualization of the complexities of urban space. What, for Lefebvre, transforms 'setting' into 'landscape', then, is 'the interruption of the narrative by contemplation' which 'has the effect of *isolating* the object of the gaze, of momentarily freeing it from its narrative function'. In other words, 'a filmic landscape [is] a *doubly temporalised landscape* ... subjected simultaneously to the temporality of the cinematographic medium and to that of the spectator's gaze'.²⁸ In Lefebvre's schema, this gaze may be cued in ways that transcend the immediacy of certain conventional aesthetic practices such as the ordering of space within the frame – what he calls 'the "intentional" landscape'²⁹ – and instead relate to the notion of an 'impure' spectatorship that draws upon 'cultural context that makes it possible to direct the "landscape gaze" onto the narrative spaces of the fiction ... despite the absence of strategies or intentions to make them autonomous'.³⁰ There are examples of both of these practices in a key sequence involving the early stages of Yumisaka's investigation into the disappearance of Inukai.

In the first shot, from the shores of Hokkaido overlooking the neighbouring Shimokita peninsula, the spectator is guided to make the transition from 'setting' to 'landscape' through a number of audiovisual cues of the kind described in the landscape work of P. Adams Sitney.³¹ First we have the deployment of widescreen technology and the ordering potential of a contemplative panoramic long shot that allows the spectator to engage directly, though nonetheless discreetly, from a high-angle perspective, with the field of vision of the detectives. The muted tonality of the landscape – aided by the black-and-white cinematography – is presented in contrast to the near-silhouetted human bodies who gaze across the expanse of water, their voices simultaneously drawing attention to what we see and working against the natural order of the gentle lapping of waves we hear on the soundtrack (figure 1). Second, in common with such moments in narrative filmmaking, there is a compositional tension between the photographic stillness of cinematic landscape and the potential of movement. What makes this particular 'intentional' landscape gaze so potent is that although we are sharing the protagonists' gaze within the immediacy of the film's diegetic present, the men are referring to a past that they, unlike the film's actual spectator, are uniquely unable to witness. Only we can recall the opening frames of the film with their turbulent images of storm-ravaged seas; a constant reminder that all

landscape within the fragmented chronology and geography of this film is infused with an enduring sense of instability.

We see this especially in the ensuing images through the dislocated camerawork necessitated by the choppy water and the abrupt and unsettling contrast between extreme low- and high-angle shots as the characters arrive on the peninsula (figures 2–3). The latter appear so unmotivated by any kind of human perception or behaviour that it is as if the presence of the physical landscape is evoked to suggest it possesses a force of its own. Is it, indeed, this elemental quality that helps prompt Yumisaka's speculative reverse negative flashback? (figure 4) Shots such as these seem to me to be more elusive, or 'impure', to return to Lefebvre's formulation; they seem determined by a greater sense of ambiguity that opens the way to a consideration of the projection of the film's thematic or symbolic concerns.³² These continue to emerge when there is a further transition from Yumisaka's ruminations in imagined time to the 'real' time and space of Inukai's wanderings on the charred volcanic landscape of Osorezan. It is useful to note that here the two characters may be implicitly linked by their direct bodily contact with the materiality of the soil.

At first we only see Inukai's legs and feet as he passes over the vaporous earth; its mysterious porous qualities are further reiterated when we cut to a series of receding long shots emphasizing the figure's desolate isolation (figures 5–6). Inukai eventually reaches a hut, and the camera – for the first time in this part of the sequence – tracks in as if to establish a new mode of narrative attention (figures 7–8). It is now that we are introduced to the blind female figure known as the *itako*, whose foreboding presence signals the contextual significance of this particular location. Osorezan is traditionally held to be a space where the souls of Japan's dead linger in a form of shadow life to be called upon by shamanic ritual. During the course of a festival, usually held during July, relatives are able to watch as the *itako* calls up the spirits of their deceased family members. As Marilyn Ivy argues in her book *Discourses of the Vanishing*, if the Shimokita region 'represents a limit to knowledge, knowledge of another Japan', Mount Osore in particular has traditionally served as 'a powerful site for the enactment of allegories of loss, a staging ground for practices that linger on the verge of vanishing'.³³ In the context of Uchida's own realization of its significance within postwar Japanese culture, the region thus specifically provides a liminal landscape that can be read in terms of both space and time. On the one hand the forlorn mountainscapes and coastal waters serve to evoke a natural geography (and cultural order), one yet to feel the impact of postwar urban modernization. On the other hand, as well as being a link between the cultural forms of the past and the present, the figure of the *itako* also offers a kind of ghostly continuity between the dead and the living. In so doing, she might be said to enhance a specific understanding of the troubling legacy of recent conflict in terms of its continued significance within the contemporary national sphere.

32 Lefebvre, 'Between setting and landscape in the cinema', pp. 48–51.

33 Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1995), pp. 141, 142.



Fig. 1.



Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.

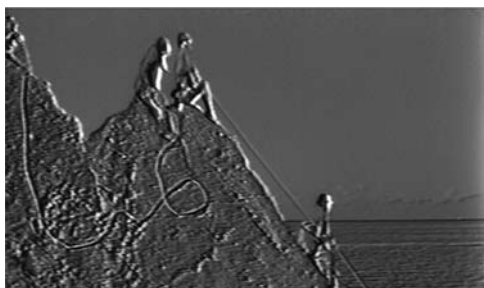


Fig. 4.



Fig. 5.



Fig. 6.



Fig. 7.



Fig. 8. All images from *Kiga kaikyo/A Fugitive from the Past* (Uchida Tomu, 1965).

³⁴ Augustin Berque, *Japan: Nature, Artifice and Japanese Culture* (Yelvertoft Manor: Pilkington Press, 1997), p. 72.

³⁵ Catherine Fowler and Gillian Helfield, 'Introduction', in Fowler and Helfield (eds), *Representing the Rural: Space, Place and Identity in Films About the Land* (Detroit, IL: Wayne State University Press, 2006), pp. 6, 12.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

As Augustin Berque has noted in his detailed study of nature, artifice and the Japanese landscape, 'the inner logic of any landscape ... [be it of] a certain milieu, or historical or geographical context ... [rests in the way it] establishes nature and culture in a certain relationship'.³⁴ According to Berque, traditional Japanese culture has conventionally configured this spatially in terms of the geographical relations between the mountains and seashore and the town and the city, and temporally in terms of the relationship between the festive or commemorative and the everyday. Within this schema, a whole set of subsidiary concerns emerge concerning the distinction between the sacred and the profane and the ordinary demarcations that emerge between the spheres of play and work. In some ways, this patterning is no different from concerns that have emerged within the context of western culture's engagement with modernity. In their useful theorization of the representation of the rural in cinematic space, Catherine Fowler and Gillian Helfield, for instance, posit three significant tropes concerning the particular topographic importance of the land: as an 'idealized space for community', a site indicating an established or longed-for connection to the past, and a 'physical territory' for the imagining of an 'unspoken character, or mythic and symbolic presence'.³⁵ For Fowler and Helfield, what distinguishes the relationship between the urban and the rural are

points of tension rather than points of contrast. ... Underlying all rural cinema is a contemporary consciousness that complicates yet also specializes its apparent attachment to the past, while at the same time drawing it nearer to the concerns of urban cinema: the expression of ongoing conflicts within a rapidly changing society or culture and the need to maintain a connection to a pure cultural or national identity, lost through urban assimilation and the dissipation or abandonment of traditions and rituals that in the rural context has kept its identity alive.³⁶

I think what illuminates the particular interrelationship between these concerns in *A Fugitive from the Past*, however, is that the film provides an intense engagement with the iconography of national identity whilst simultaneously presenting an understanding of how this can be situated in a permanently uneasy and mobile cinematic relationship between both the past and the present, and the centre and the periphery. It is not so much that the rural landscapes of the Shimokita Peninsula are perceived as a world away from the urban landscapes of Tokyo, but that within the ideological schema of the film both spaces are haunted by an interconnected and ongoing history that remains to be actively detected.

With this in mind, I shall now briefly leave the rugged waters and mountains of Northern Japan in the film in order to examine how Uchida represents the spaces of the American Occupation and its aftermath in the cityscapes of Tokyo and the port location of Maizaru. Here we are invited to concentrate on the film's specific representation of Occupation Japan. Unconcerned with the vagaries of late 1940s US censorship that had an impact on such contemporary dramas such as Ozu Yasujiro's *Nagaya*

shinshiroku/Record of a Tenement Gentleman (1947) in terms of their affective portrayal of the deprivations of the postwar settlement, Uchida's film is explicitly filled with images of the impact of the recent devastation caused by the US bombings. In one key moment, for instance, Detective Yumisaka is dispatched to the streets of the capital yet seems unable to command any controlling perspective on his environs in his search for the missing figure of Yae. Instead it is Uchida's mobile camera that uncovers a wider conception of Japan's disordered postwar society, into which she has apparently disappeared. The sequence begins with a closeup of the lower half of the detective's torso as he walks along a filthy, litter-strewn pavement. The camera tilts up but maintains a canted perspective as we see a bridge leading to Tokyo's Ueno station in the background and a number of placards and flyers in the foreground proclaiming that Japan's soldiers should be repatriated. The working-class district of Ueno was one of the main focal points for the return migration of the nation's colonial footsoldiers after the end of World War II, though in truth many of these men never returned from Japan's former territories; they were lost in the futile fields of conflict. As Yumisaka recedes into the distance of the frame, Uchida disengages with him altogether and the camera tracks right to the other side of the bridge to observe the teeming numbers of dispossessed people hawking their wares to passers-by. One person reassures a potential customer that he is selling a genuinely 'American shoe'. This is the harsh reality of the new social and political dispensation; a reality that seems explicitly allied with one man's individual search for criminal justice suggests a wider conception of political wrongdoing.

In this sense, a number of the Tokyo scenes evoke a conception of time and space reminiscent of films such as Edward Dmytryk's war veteran noir *Crossfire* (made in 1947, the year in which this section of the film is set), and remind one of Vivian Sobchack's potent characterization of US film noir's 'lounge time', in which the characters and the nation were 'fixed in a transitional moment looking back toward a retrospectively idyllic world that could not historically be recuperated, and looking forward with a certain inertial apprehension of a probable dead end'.³⁷ In an introductory studio-based long take, for example, a teeming street scene clearly evokes the troubled hybridity of the era as US soldiers, impoverished shopkeepers and returning war veterans from Japan's lost empire are interlinked by Uchida and his cinematographer Nakazawa Hanjirō's continuously roving camera. Here, for example, there is no static gaze, no invitation to peruse and examine the defining contours of the landscape. This sequence, in its organization of spatial cues such as the deployment of extensive mobile framing, and thus prominent attention given to inferred offscreen relations, squares firmly with Lefebvre's conception of narrative cinematic space as 'setting'. Camera movement is broadly subordinate to the motivational movement of the human figure. Space is determinedly congested, fluid and chaotic.

In another long take, this time shot on location by the waterside in downtown Tokyo, we begin with an almost abstract image of a collection

37 Vivian Sobchack, "'Lounge time': post-war crises and the chronotope of film noir", in Nick Browne (ed.), *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 129–70.

of lost floating objects: a bundle of *tatami* matting, a coil of hose, a solitary glass bottle. There is no discernible perspective to the image within the frame. The camera shifts left and locates a group of four, probably orphaned, boys sitting on a series of steps leading into the rippling water. It pauses as it watches them nurturing a fire in order to keep warm, then continues to move steadily until it fixes slowly upon the figure of Yae, lost in thought. The camera then descends vertically from the height that it has assumed, and in so doing reveals the ‘setting’ that Yae inhabits: the low-rise contours of the occupied capital, with an uneven line of traffic moving across the screen to the rear. Unlike, for example, the figure of Detective Yumisaka near the beginning of the film, Yae’s gaze is averted from the immediate space around her to the extent that the water occupying the bulk of the frame acts as a boundary between her and the broader social sphere. Her world is blocked and self-contained; she has no access to the sharper contours of history.

As the central character during many of these segments of the film, Yae is still involved in the then legal profession of prostitution (as the narrative later makes clear, as the film begins to reach its temporal climax, prostitution was only made illegal in 1956). This is significant. Yae’s good-natured, even virtuous, innocence, quite the opposite of any Hollywood femme fatale (such as Gloria Grahame in *Crossfire*), ultimately curtails the radical political potential of the film by allowing a strategic sense of victimhood to permeate the social discourse. It seems to suggest a timeless continuum of feminine virtue that negates the harsher realities of why the Americans are actually there, sharing the same screen space as the ordinary citizens of Japan’s capital. This ambivalence leads us to think more conclusively about the politics of place and, in particular, the broader relationship between the legacy of the war and the construction of national spaces within the film.

As the notion of *ten to sen* implies, a further key element of the way that relations between time, space and location are configured within the film is through the recurring motif of the railway train. Yae and Inukai actually meet on a country train making its way through the rural landscapes of Northern Honshu. In order to suggest the passage of time from the early years of the American Occupation to the mid 1950s and the regeneration of Tokyo as a major urban metropolis, Uchida chooses a dramatically powerful nocturnal long shot of the city in which the headlights of a locomotive pass across a static landscape of apartments, factories and office buildings. This insertion of an ‘intentional landscape’ gaze within the film’s *mise-en-scene* calls attention to the dual focus of the image: not only does the train work as a metaphor for temporal acceleration, but the surrounding vista serves as a form of direct signification of the material prosperity experienced by the nation in the intervening years. This pattern is reiterated when we accompany Yae on her journey by train to the port of Maizaru, where she travels to renew her acquaintance with her benefactor following a chance sighting of a newspaper report telling how a prominent local industrialist has initiated a fund to help with the rehabilitation of

former criminals. In this sequence, Yae, now dressed in fashionable black mid-1950s western-style clothing, exits the railway station and in medium closeup gazes from right to left of the frame to the offscreen space beyond. The next shot is a reverse-field edit that inserts the female figure at the centre of a visibly different social landscape: the clean, prosperous and sunlit main street of a provincial city. The sound of cicadas is a prominent element on the soundtrack and this is accompanied by an image of a tree-lined avenue with a view to the mountains beyond that complements the signs of thriving business activity in the immediate foreground. As the sequence progresses beyond the railway station, Uchida returns to images of children and the military but in a different, now apparently integrated, context. In a long tracking shot that follows the figure of Yae walking rightwards along the shore of the sea, Uchida preserves a sense of balance within the framing of the image to suggest a different, more even, temporal-spatial continuum. We see Japanese soldiers in uniform pass her in the opposite direction, and are simultaneously invited to gaze into the middle and long distance of the picture and observe a group of well-dressed children playing by the waterside and, beyond that, a line of frigates in front of a backdrop of mountains. The staging of this shot suggests an intermediary moment within the diegesis that combines the 'landscape gaze' of earlier sections of the film with a more subjective apprehension of Yae's imminent reunion with the former murderer and thief. Our spectatorial knowledge of the man's past and the distinctive regrouping of the key elements of the mise-en-scene that I have just outlined serve to undermine the apparently transparent harmony of this milieu. The forces governing the temporal and topographical jigsaw of the film's narrative are about to be redrawn and, once again, the past is about to invade the present.

As I have begun to argue, the great unspoken 'repressed' of the film must indeed be the war itself, and in turn we may add to this the legacy of empire necessitated by the end of Japanese rule over swathes of the East Asian region. Alexander Jacoby has argued convincingly that the images of the devastation wreaked in the powerful opening section of the film that visualizes Inukai's escape against the backdrop of the ferry sinking, for instance, help to articulate the sense of 'a violent cataclysm which might seem to stand in for' the direct representation of trauma.³⁸ According to the logic of this reading of the film, Inukai's noirish transformation from dispossessed criminal vagrant to successful businessman in a suit in the course of a decade is but a mirror of the broader social changes undergone by the nation between demilitarization and corporate growth. There is also a hint of autobiographical tension here, for Uchida was still in China himself during 1947.

With this in mind, it makes sense to return to the film's reiteration of 'nativist landscape' in relation to what I have described as 'postwar setting'. In his telling analysis of Japan's long postwar period, from the vantage point of the late 1990s, Harry Harootunian has argued that Japanese national public memory over the years since 1945 has not

38 Alexander Jacoby, 'Tomu Uchida', *Senses of Cinema*, no. 36 (2005), <<http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/directors/05/uchida.html>> accessed 22 March 2011.

worked to recall ... the [direct] experience of wartime Japan, which the various discourses inspired by the Occupation and the enshrinement of Hiroshima effectively displaced, but rather the experience of a time when others, notably the Americans, prevented Japanese from actually forgetting their continuing status as a defeated nation.

Hence Japan, for Harootunian, 'was destined to live in *the space* rather than *the time* of a defeated nation, oppressed by an alien force, groaning in the shadows of an imposed colonialism that had thrown the country and its people outside history'.³⁹ He goes on to suggest that the

consequence of this cultural strategy [has] been to reinforce the fetishization of an experience, and the forms of representing it ... posited on the inauthenticity of the outer and the authority of the inner. Far from being an experience rooted in everyday life, the now, where the present writes its own history, this cultural experience claimed an indeterminate precinct ... [almost a] 'space without places, a time without duration'.

Harootunian's hypothesis is close in many ways to what the central fractured urban landscapes of Uchida's film – at least on the surface – seem to convey. It may well be impossible for the film to directly relay, in visual and narrative terms, a more acute understanding of the nature of the historical events leading to this conjunction, but that said, what also makes the film so interesting is its acute deployment of radically differing temporal and spatial codes of narration, to the extent that one is still potentially forced to question the legitimacy of the police detectives' analysis of one individual's flawed criminal psychology. There remains a broader pathology that, on their terms, appears to remain undetected. In his groundbreaking book on narratives of war in postwar Japanese culture, Yoshikuni Igarashi describes how the production of a new national identity in the 1950s became specifically determined by the presentation of a new, 'hygienic' 'discursively constructed body'.⁴⁰ Inukai's radical physical bodily transformation – his appearance as the successful corporate businessman Tarumi – perfectly suits this description. For Igarashi, postwar Japanese culture

naturalized the absence and silence of the past by erasing its own struggle to deal with its memories ... [to the extent that] the actual process of forgetting the loss was not an easy one ... [since] it involved a constant struggle to render memories of war into a benign, nostalgic form. When the historical process of forgetting itself became erased, the experiences of loss in war were buried within postwar society.

Thus, according to Igarashi, 'in order to remember the past, this process of forgetting has to be brought to consciousness'.⁴¹ Does Uchida's film itself begin to attempt this process?

By the time that Uchida's film was in development, the material and symbolic brightening of the capital to ready it for the staging of the Olympics had already occurred. Igarashi recounts how, for example, on 10 January 1964, spurred on by organizations such as the *Tokyo*

³⁹ Harry Harootunian, 'Japan's long postwar: the trick of memory and the ruse of history', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 99, no. 4 (2001), p. 719 (my italics).

⁴⁰ Yoshikuni Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory. Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945–1970* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 13.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

42 Ibid., p. 148.

43 Marilyn Ivy, 'Trauma's two times: Japanese wars and postwars', *Positions*, vol. 16, no. 1 (2008), p. 172.

Shin-Seikatsu Undō Kyōkai (Tokyo Metropolitan New Life Movement Association), 'as many as one million, six hundred thousand [residents] had helped clean the streets'.⁴² Does the film's return to the Shimokita Peninsula permit a sense of what it was exactly that was being swept away or does it merely reinforce the 'the authority of the inner' and reiterate the continued validity of seeing Japan's culture as uniquely singular and untainted by the contamination of events that took place during the middle period of its troubled twentieth century? Marilyn Ivy, like the contemporary Japanese sociologist Katō Nirihiro, has criticized Japan for 'not undertaking the mourning work necessary to come to terms with the historical trauma of its invasion of Asia and the millions of deaths there'.⁴³ Can the revelations that *A Fugitive from the Past* uncovers be seen as an early contribution to this necessary process?

As we know, *A Fugitive from the Past* does indeed take us back to the potent, atmospheric landscape of Northern Japan in its concluding section. In so doing, it reintroduces us to a space that is seen not so much as untainted by the urban modernity contained in the central section of the film, but as the geographical location of a temporal trajectory that still remains inconclusive. By this stage of the narrative, Inukai's present-day cover has been blown. In an extraordinary climax, Tarumi and Yae battle in Tarumi's home over the true nature of his identity, whilst Uchida constantly returns to his favoured trope of the reverse negative to reiterate the sense of an unstable temporality suffusing the drama of the moment. Forced to kill Yae, Inukai then also murders his manservant who accidentally witnesses the events. A younger police officer (played by Takakura Ken) investigates, and matters are apparently resolved once and for all when, having been enlisted to help, the retired Detective Yumisaka confronts Inukai with the ashes that he retrieved from the hillside of the Shimokita Peninsula ten years previously.

It is significant that the professional processes of detection are visualized so prominently at this stage of the film, as Uchida's deployment of the *ten to sen* method gradually draws the film's main narrative threads towards their final moment of integration. In one sense, with its prominent interweaving of multiple layers of space and time, Uchida's narration has already self-consciously confirmed the hypothesis that the police officers themselves take so long to reach. To this extent, there remains a question about the wider picture that is also revealed in the course of the investigation. One way of reading the representation of detection within the film is to suggest that the detectives simply work to reclaim a linear sequence of events that has eluded them over the years in order to confirm Inukai's guilt. But, as I have already suggested, there is arguably also a broader disordered temporality that the process of detection unravels and that is to do with the consequences of the trauma of the war years on the psyche of the nation. Like Inukai's disguised and unacknowledged relationship with the legacy of his own criminal identity, Japan's own relationship to its wartime past requires forensic examination.

In conclusion, I want to argue that *A Fugitive from the Past* reveals this dimension through an explicit engagement with the concept of the cinematic trace, and that by aligning this to the representation of landscape the film's conception of Inukai's body as a narrative agent now shifts towards something more akin to an unstable form of allegory. With this in mind, I think it is worth remembering the precision with which Uchida worked on the nature of the grain of his image in order to determine a modernist, rough-hewn sense of the relationship between the event and means by which the event was recorded. Uchida's intention was to draw attention specifically to the material impoverishment visualized within the film's mise-en-scene, but this also had the consequence of allowing the spectator to think more directly about the nature of film as evidence in the context of a film that disorients the equilibrium between the recorded and the real. *A Fugitive from the Past* is a period film in which the past happens twice over: in the form of what the camera records at the moment of filming and in the form of what these recorded images are then said to represent within the diegesis. Uchida seems uniquely aware of the duality of this process by posing a relationship between the fragmentary evidence that the detectives find and the fragmentary nature of film as a recording medium. His method of disrupting spatiotemporal continuity, of reverting to reverse negative imagery and of denying access to any one determining form of subjectivity, suggests a dissatisfaction with a conception of the photographic image whose causality rests simply in a conception of the 'literal spatial and temporal molding of the originating event, preserved in a physical material'.⁴⁴ One is forced instead to work hard to discern what can actually be said to have happened and in what order; or, as with all detective fiction, to think about the relationship between what has been seen and said and what remains unspoken and invisible.

The visualization of Tarumi/Inukai's journey back to Shimokita begins with the final railway journey of the film. We see the sleeping businessman in a train carriage; the window blind is half drawn, as if to shut out the elements of the mobile landscape, just visible to the spectator, that pass by outside. The criminal is surrounded by a phalanx of police officers gazing at his features; his silence and inscrutability are a final act of resistance. As he wakes, framed in a one-shot to the right-hand side of the frame, he pulls the blind up and thus inserts a clearly legible 'intentional landscape' gaze within the compositional construction of the image. We now see him looking outside the frame within the frame at the lapping waters of the seas of the Shimokita region. To reinforce this critical perspective, Uchida's camera recalibrates the picture by moving in more closely and removing Inukai's features altogether. Although the camera position is static, the consequence of the impact of the moving train is that the shot now resembles an extended mobile long take. This is significant, for we next cut seamlessly to another mobile long shot of water offering a similar degree of compositional detail and duration. As the camera pans right, we see the shore of the Shimokita reemerge for our examination. It is only when the camera comes to a halt by including the aged figure of Detective

44 D. N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 11.

Yumisaka, on board a ferry, that we realize that this is another example of a human-centric landscape gaze; this time reuniting the two men with the site of their first encounter ten years before.

In his study of the relationship between landscape and human memory, Simon Schama makes the point that 'landscape may indeed be a text on which generations write their recurring obsessions'.⁴⁵ For Schama, elements of an 'inanimate topography ... [have the potential of being] turned into material agents in their own right'.⁴⁶ Is this what happens here? The waters and mountainscapes of the region certainly hold a damaged spiritual legacy by the film's conclusion, and the memories that they contain are perhaps uniquely contested. This is a landscape of loss as well as of commemoration. For the fathers of the Japanese colonialist project that took Japan away from being just a traditional coastal nation to an aggressively seafaring one, the heart of nativist culture rested in the nation's symbiotic relationship with the sea. Writers such as Shiga Shigetaka, in the late nineteenth century, and Wakamizu Tetsugoro, at the height of war in the 1940s, argued for a traditional understanding of the superiority of Japanese culture in terms of the quality of its coastal landscape.⁴⁷ It could therefore be argued that in connecting the damage of Inukai's unacknowledged criminality with a potential reiteration of these perspectives, Uchida's film inserts another level of understanding that reinforces the original trauma visualized in the sinking of the ferry at the beginning of the film. In its calling for the work of memory and mourning to begin, and in turning away from the blockages of the officially sanctioned landscapes of the Japanese postwar period, *A Fugitive from the Past* thus ultimately argues for the necessary return to the past in order to fully make sense of the present. When Yumisaka moves over on the ferry to remind his prisoner that up amongst the mountains is the birthplace not only of Yae but of Osorezan, we are reminded of the shamanic presence of the *itako* hovering somewhere in their rituals between the world of life and the world of death. In a final act of imaginary reconciliation, Yumisaka suggests that the two men enact remembrance by placing flowers into the waves below. The detective gazes out at the landscape one final time and chants the Buddhist sutra of the *hannya kyō*, but his call for shared remembrance goes unheeded.⁴⁸ Inukai, still trapped in the disguise of his contemporary business suit, falters and stares with trepidation at the space beyond. If one is to read his body as not just that of a singularly misguided criminal but as the vessel of a wider apprehension of sanitized past trauma, then what ensues at this moment is highly significant, for he lunges towards the camera and then down into the churning waves below. There is nowhere else for him to go. With the dramatic suicide of its central protagonist, the resolution of the film's narrative thus finally suggests an imaginary corporeal presence now clearly unable to sustain the historical legacy of the havoc caused directly by conflict and empire.

⁴⁵ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), p. 12.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴⁷ See Berque, *Japan: Nature, Artifice and Japanese Culture*, p. 50.

⁴⁸ The word *hannya* relates to a female demon in Shintō and Buddhist cosmology that is frequently represented in the form of a mask in Nōh theatre. It is a complex signifier of human emotions and, as well as being associated with rage, jealousy and vengeance, it is also linked to the realm of ghosts and the spirits of the dead.

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Beautiful images in spectacular clarity: spectacular television, landscape programming and the question of (tele)visual pleasure

HELEN WHEATLEY

In the past five years there has been an explosion of rural imagery on British television, a veritable feast of rolling hills and dramatic coastline, all accompanied by soaring orchestral scores and state-of-the-art HD aerial photography. Felix Thompson recently struggled with the categorization of this programming as a 'geography genre', 'country themed series' and 'travelogue', ultimately proposing that 'it is more appropriate to think of a general geographical disposition adopted by British television towards the hinterland'.¹ This essay will suggest that one might better understand programmes such as *Bird's Eye View* (BBC, 1969–71), *A Picture of Britain* (BBC, 2005), *Coast* (The Open University/BBC, 2005–), *Britain's Favourite View* (ITV, 2007) and the *Wainwright Walks* series (Skyworks for BBC4, 2007–09) as forming a (currently very popular) mode of landscape programming *and* as a significant part of a broader trend in what I have termed 'spectacular television'. Drawing on literature on landscape in film and fine art, I shall sketch the identifying characteristics of landscape as it relates to British television. Understanding television as spectacular might be a stretch too far for some, but in revisiting both early and recent scholarship on television aesthetics it will hopefully become plain that the identification of television as 'anti-spectacular' has been a product of establishing a set of

1 Felix Thompson, 'Is there a geography genre on British television? Explorations of the hinterland from *Coast* to *Countryfile*', *Critical Studies in Television*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2010), p. 65.

false binaries around the difference between television and film in criticism.

My initial interest in television's spectacular landscapes was prompted by three realizations attached to three specific events in my personal and professional life, which will provide an illuminating starting point for this analysis. The first was a visit to the BBC headquarters at White City, London, at the end of October 2006. This date is significant, coming four months after the beginning of the BBC's HDTV trial and coinciding with the broadcast of the second series of *Coast* (the first season of *Coast* to use HD filming for its aerial photography, described on its DVD box set as 'stunning aerial images shot in High Definition – so you can see our beautiful coastline in unparalleled detail and clarity'). The lobby in which I waited for my meeting to start was the first place I had ever seen an HD television; here a large, expensive, flat screen set which faced the front doors of the reception at White City, screening an HD showreel (which included images from *Coast* Series 2), accompanied by a voiceover and integrated text pronouncing HD television to be 'the next big adventure' for the BBC, and 'the future of television'. Dazzled, indeed, by the beauty and the clarity of the landscape photography, it became clear to me that the programmes dwelling on landscape imagery on screen (*Coast*, *Planet Earth* [BBC/BR/WDR, 2006], and even the BBC's adaptation of *Bleak House* [Deep Indigo/Smallweed for BBC/WGBH, 2005]) must have been made specifically with these new television sets and their viewers in mind. So my first realization about television's spectacular landscapes related to the complexity of the relationship between technological and generic change. All of the genres represented here preexisted the advent of HD broadcasting in one form or another, and in the case of the natural history programme and the literary adaptation had also been associated with visual pleasure in earlier scholarly writing,² but it was clear that certain spectacular forms and genres were being brought to the fore at a moment when an expensive new technology needed to be sold to the masses.

The second time that these programmes came to my attention was during August 2007, when I was struck with the realization that programmes featuring rural imagery had reached a point of critical mass, saturating the television schedule. For example, on Sunday 12 August an impressive 33% of the 8.00 pm to 1.00 am schedule on BBC1, BBC2 and BBC4 was taken up by what might loosely be described as programming which dwelled on rural landscape, while *Britain's Favourite View* on ITV1 was scheduled against reruns of *Coast* on BBC2, and *Vicar's Wives* (KMB for ITV, 2007), set on the rural south coast of England, was scheduled in a late-night graveyard slot against reruns of *The Great British Village Show* (BBC, 2007) on BBC1. Clearly riding on the success of *Coast* and similar shows, the summer schedules featured a glut of programmes that dwelt on landscape imagery – specifically the landscapes of the British countryside at the time – and in which the art of walking (or rambling, sauntering or strolling) through these rural spaces was often matched with the search for a 'perfect view'. For at least part of each of

2 See, for example, Helen Wheatley, 'The limits of television? Natural history programming and the transformation of public service broadcasting', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 7, no. 3 (2004), pp. 325–39, for a discussion of visual pleasure in the natural history programme; and John Caughie's discussion of the visual pleasures of the literary adaptation in his *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism and British Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 203–25.

Fig. 1. The living room as gallery space: the new flat screen set.

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³ Martin Lefebvre, 'Between setting and landscape in the cinema', in Lefebvre (ed.), *Landscape and Film* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 19–59.

these programmes (and others beyond) we saw what Martin Lefebvre, in his analysis of landscape in cinema, refers to as 'space freed from eventhood',³ as opposed to land as setting. This was not just Sunday night programming, however; it was everywhere throughout the week, creating a nostalgic, 'heritage' image of an 'unspoilt Britain' entirely devoid of urban space or industrialization. Looking forward and backward across the television listings guide, it became clear that a crossgeneric mode of programming had developed – the landscape mode – which had an aesthetic history beyond the medium of television, a mode that challenged many of the critical assumptions about television's lack of interest in, and inability to produce, the spectacular.

The third realization relates to a more recent event: the moment in 2009 when the first member of my family bought an HD-ready, wall-hanging, flat screen television. This set (see figure 1), hanging on the wall in my brother-in-law's house, clearly had the spatial characteristics of a painting and was positioned in the room where a large print had once been. Debbie Rodan's analysis of the marketing of these new sets stresses, in particular, the ways in which they have been positioned by those selling them as objects of 'aesthetic beauty', whereby the 'screen is rendered spectacular, visually pleasing and placed on display'.⁴ She goes on to note that 'the architecture of the room [in the advertising of these sets] is signified as the interior of a public gallery space'.⁵ Considering Rodan's analysis in relation to my brother-in-law's television set, I began to look for other images of the positioning of these new sets and came across first the 'TV frame' (figure 2), an add-on frame that could be purchased to surround a flat screen set, giving it the physical appearance of a piece of art rather than a piece of domestic technology within the living room, and second the phenomenon of the 'art screen TV', in which the new flat screen HD

⁴ Debbie Rodan, 'Large, sleek, slim, stylish flat screens: privatized space and the televisual experience', *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, vol. 23, no. 3 (2009), p. 371.

⁵ Ibid.

Fig. 2. The TV Frame.
© DarrynsCustomCabinets.com.



TV could be framed as a piece of fine art might be *and* hidden out of sight when not in use by a reproduction painting (often a landscape painting), which could be drawn up and down (figure 3). Television as an object was being given the visual status of fine art within the living room, and the predominance of landscape imagery in television (and sometimes over it) began to make more sense in relation to this. Television's current wealth of landscape imagery might in fact be partly understood as television being occasionally viewed and appreciated as popular 'ambient' art. The sleek, minimalist, galleriesque rooms, identified by Rodan and also seen in the promotion of the products discussed above, are, therefore, the (real and imagined) domestic spaces of HD television.

As a genre of painting, landscape art has been repeatedly understood, and often disparaged, as 'mass art' from within the academies. From the fifteenth century onwards landscape painting has been seen as less challenging, and therefore a lesser art, than other forms, producing pictures that 'merely pleased the eye and provided little to occupy the mind', according to art historian Norbert Wolf;⁶ though as Wolf goes on to note, 'the immense and growing public popularity of landscape pictures over the centuries gradually undermined academic dogma'.⁷ It is this mass appeal that the producers of *A Picture of Britain*, *Wainwright Walks*, *Britain's Favourite View* and others seek to tap into in the search for viewers in an age of increased and increasing competition. As the number of channels proliferates and broadcasters' hold on both the licence fee (in the case of the BBC) and advertising revenue (in the case of the commercial broadcasters) grows ever more shaky, commissioners and programme makers are clearly looking for programming with both

⁶ Norbert Wolf, *Landscape Painting* (Cologne: Taschen, 2008), p. 9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Fig. 3. The 'Hide and Chic'.
© Décor technologies.com.



8 See particularly John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video* (London: Routledge, 1982).

9 See, for example, John Thornton Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis and Authority in American Television* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

10 See Amy Holdsworth, "'Slow television'" and Stephen Poliakoff's *Shooting the Past*, *Journal of British Film and Television*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2006), pp. 128–33, for a discussion of slow television.

11 James Bennett 'Your window on the world: the emergence of red-button interactive television in the UK', *Convergence*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2008), pp. 161–82.

popular appeal and an associated suggestion (at least) of cultural value. For the remainder of this essay, then, I shall explore the pictorial qualities of these programmes and the associated articulation of visual pleasure on television. It is my proposal that these programmes presume a *contemplative* mode of viewing more traditionally associated with the spectacular in fine art and photography, and at odds both with theories of the distracted viewer identified by early theorists of television⁸ and with countertheories of 'sit forward' viewer engagement or enthrallment (developed particularly in relation to describing the viewing of recent 'quality drama').⁹ This contemplative mode of viewing is clearly also encouraged by the repositioning of the HD, flat screen television set as discussed above; the shift in spatial relations in the contemporary living room may indeed partly have invited the recent flurry of landscape programming. Whilst rejecting a technologically determinist argument about the rise of HD shooting and viewing technologies and the advent of this mode of programming (earlier examples of such programming suggest the mode has a much longer history), it will also be argued that the current cycle of programmes, proliferating since 2006 as at no other time in the genre's history, must be understood as postdigital revolution television. This is simultaneously 'slow television',¹⁰ which allows for a contemplative gaze on spectacular 'natural' landscapes, and also a heavily-CGI'd cycle of programming drawing on a 'Google Earth' aesthetic through the pronounced use of satellite imagery to produce a frenzy of dazzling topography, showcasing the spectacle of such 'new' technologies.

It should be noted here that this analysis is centred on a rather old-fashioned notion of the 'programme', concentrating wholly on the programme as broadcast (and reproduced as episodes in the DVD box set) rather than the array of tie-in intertexts of each series. As James Bennett has argued, many of the programmes in this study were conceived of as multiplatform *projects* rather than simple programmes.¹¹ In relation to *A Picture of Britain*, for example, Bennett provides a useful summary of the interwoven elements of programme, offshoot programmes on other channels, the website and interactive television applications, and an exhibition at the Tate Britain gallery that accompanied the series. The complexity of this project and others (*Coast*, for example, had a tie-in

walking guide downloadable to mobile phones for its first series) raises a series of tangential questions about the operation of landscape and spectacle *across* texts, media and events which are equally interesting but not the focus of this essay. I shall concentrate instead on the programme at the centre of each multiplatform project in order to understand the operation of spectacle on television screens specifically. These wider questions will have to be put aside for now.

As suggested in my introduction, this analysis of landscape television forms part of a broader study of spectacular television, building on the groundbreaking work of such scholars as John T. Caldwell and, more recently, Mimi White,¹² who have brought our attention to the inadequacies of those cornerstones of television scholarship which, in establishing television's difference from cinema, have too quickly dismissed the medium's spectacular qualities. Arguments about television which emphasize comparison with cinema typically position the medium as visually inefficient,¹³ sound-led and lacking in visual detail,¹⁴ or simply 'less dense, less complex, less interesting in comparison to film'.¹⁵ Theories of television's distracted viewership also understand television as anti-spectacular, and, as White has argued, 'the emphasis on the temporality of liveness on television (immediacy, interruption) distracts from consideration of the medium's spatial articulations'.¹⁶ White summarizes: 'Television's ability to *show* things, and its interest therein, has been unduly muted by [this scholarship]. Yet television has demonstrated an abiding interest in visual spectacle for its own sake, in the televisual attraction.'¹⁷ *Abiding* is the key term here. One might want to argue that television has changed significantly since Raymond Williams wrote *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* in 1974, and that his characterization of television as anti-spectacular simply relates to another era of programme making. Caldwell's argument is certainly that television becomes more televisual (stylistically exhibitionist, in his terms) in the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, although this essay focuses on contemporary HD television, it is certainly not the case that television is *suddenly spectacular*; rather that the medium's already spectacular forms and genres become more prominent in the context of HD broadcasting. For example, in the *BBC Handbook* of 1940, the edition that commented on the year that television service was halted at the start of World War II, an anonymous writer produced the following, wistfully evocative picture of prewar television broadcasting:

We throw a glance nowadays at the blank screens of our receivers and remember when they held us like a spell. We recall the constantly changing scene: Royal processions, tennis at Wimbledon, comedies and thrillers in the studios, the big fights of Harringey and Earl's Court, the living portraits of *Picture Page*, the breath-catching tumbling acts of variety, the fun and music of revue and cabaret, the pure pictorial beauty of masque and opera, and we ask with Keats, 'Was it a vision, or a waking dream?'¹⁸

12 See Mimi White 'The attractions of television: reconsidering liveness', in Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy (eds), *MediaSpace: Place, Scale and Culture in a Media Age* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 75–92.

13 See, for example, Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 28.

14 See, for example, Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, p. 112.

15 Karen Lury, *Interpreting Television* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), p. 8.

16 White 'The attractions of television', p. 79.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

18 BBC, *BBC Handbook 1940* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1940), p. 55.

19 Ibid., p. 56.

20 See 'Looking at the British landscape from the air', *BBC Archive*, <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/aerialjourneys/5316.shtml>> accessed 16 March 2011. Several episodes are currently streamed via the BBC website.

21 The exception to this is the second shot in this sequence, which tracks around the outside of a modern high-rise block of flats in an unidentifiable urban location.

Here we see the language of spectacle being articulated to describe the programming the medium was broadcasting in 1939, a year in which the BBC also argued that 'the outside broadcasts continued to win the more spectacular triumphs'.¹⁹

Furthermore, in arguing for continuity rather than a (tele)visual revolution in the contemporary moment, we could also look at much earlier examples of landscape programming, if we understand this mode as the zenith of spectacular television, to locate an emphasis on spectacle and visual pleasure prior to the advent of HD broadcasting. For example *Bird's Eye View*, described by the BBC in a web-based retrospective of the 'aerial journey' programme as a 'series of helicopter travelogues providing breathtaking views of the British Isles',²⁰ was produced in 1969 by Paul Bonner and series-edited by Edward Mirzoeff, with several episodes, including its opening one, scripted and narrated by John Betjeman. The programme was shot entirely from an Alouette II helicopter by Geoff Mulligan, and although this earlier series lacks the image quality of later examples of the landscape mode on television, its emphasis on the spectacle of aerial photography, and on spectacular montage (a term defined at greater length below), very much aligns it with the visual pleasure of later series such as *Coast* and *A Picture of Britain*. Its title sequence, a jazz-scored montage of aerial filming in action, which moves from closeups of parts of the helicopter from which the series is filmed to much longer shots of the aircraft hovering above unidentified green fields, spectacularizes and glamorizes the means of production: the final shot of this sequence before the title comes up sees the helicopter fly into the direct line of the sun, bathing the machine in a kind of 'heavenly glow' and suggesting an omniscient viewpoint for the series. In contrast, in the first episode of the series, 'An Englishman's Home' (tx 5 April 1969), a slower montage of aerial footage of that great British signifier, the stately home, follows this title sequence. This montage, accompanied by the first line of John Betjeman's poetic voiceover ('There's a saying, you've heard it before, the Englishman's home is his castle. Well I suppose, in a way, it is') and Dame Nellie Melba singing Sir Henry Bishop and John Howard Payne's 1923 classic, 'Home, Sweet Home!', further emphasizes an aestheticization of the English landscape on television through lingering aerial photography that moves slowly around a series of large houses set in rural spaces.²¹ This series, whilst offering commentary which was sometimes highly critical of the human impact on the British landscape (as in the episode 'Green and Pleasant Land' [tx 22 June 1969]), can be seen as a direct precursor of the more recent series considered in this study, given that it similarly capitalizes on the rural and coastal views of Britain in a way which emphasizes a contemplative appreciation of this space as a 'view'.

The use of archival material *within* the contemporary landscape programme also reminds us that the spectacle of the national tour, the desire to access remote and beautiful places *for* the viewer, has been a constant on British television. For example, towards the beginning of the

first episode of *A Picture of Britain* ('The Romantic North' [tx 5 June 2005]), extracts from presenter David Dimbleby's appearance (with his brother Jonathan) in an episode of the UK travel series *No Passport* entitled 'The English Lakes' (tx 24 February 1960) are edited into his return to the same location. The sequence begins with a cut from Dimbleby in his car (in 2005), talking to camera about his first 'visit' to the area, to a shot of him driving a car past the camera on a road signed to Windermere in 1960. What follows is a montage of images from their programme on the Lakes, culminating in a picture-postcard shot of Ashness Bridge, with Derwent Water and Skiddaw mountain in the rear, which slowly dissolves from 1960s black-and-white to sumptuous colour footage taken from exactly the same camera position in 2005. The slow dissolve here means that the continuity of television's landscape imagery is emphasized through a 'ghostly' overlaying of footage from two eras (figure 4), reinforced by Dimbleby's observation that 'the extraordinary thing is it really hasn't changed much'. Here, then, a piece of television history is inserted into the text to assert three things: the unchanging nature of British television (albeit with Dimbleby later commenting on the shift in standardized accents for television), alongside the unchanging nature of the British landscape, and, by association, British national identity. This sequence thus warns us of the problem of viewing television landscapes as a recent phenomenon, tied solely to the advent of HD broadcasting, whilst simultaneously alerting us to the rather jingoistic ways in which the representation of landscape has been, and continues to be, tied to an image of national identity as simple and unchanging.²²

It perhaps does not need to be stated that one of the key strands to have emerged from theorizations of landscape, particularly in the field of cultural geography, has been its distinction from 'land' – as W. J. T. Mitchell puts it, 'Landscape is a natural scene mediated by culture'.²³ Simon Schama has similarly argued that 'landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock'.²⁴ Cultural geographers have sought to understand the ways in which human interaction with nature and environment have produced landscape, and arguably we must see the programmes at the heart of this study as part of this act of cultural production; their handling of space and place *affirms* landscape's position within the national imaginary, even though these programmes often place narrative emphasis on 'discovering' rather than 'constructing' the natural scene.

In attempting to understand the popularity and pervasiveness of landscape subjects in fine art, it has often been argued, particularly from a Marxist position, that landscape art acts as a response to an increasingly urbanized or technologically mediated world. This is what Malcolm Andrews calls the 'compensation thesis'.²⁵ As Wolf suggests, 'People to whom nature appears in the form of landscape no longer live unthinkingly in nature. They are alienated from it, and can feel one with nature only through the mediation of aesthetics';²⁶ at this point the aesthetic value of land replaces its 'use and dependency value'.²⁷ As Wolf points out,

²² For an excellent discussion of the negotiation of national identity in *Coast*, see Felix Thompson, 'Coast and Spooks: on the permeable national boundaries of British television', *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3 (2010), pp. 429–38.

²³ W. J. T. Mitchell (ed.), *Landscape and Power* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 5.

²⁴ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), p. 6.

²⁵ Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 18.

²⁶ Wolf, *Landscape Painting*, p. 8.

²⁷ Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art*, p. 21.

Fig. 4. *A Picture of Britain*: overlaying TV landscapes past and present. © BBC.



²⁸ Wolf, *Landscape Painting*, p. 8.

²⁹ William Boddy, *New Media and Popular Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Lynn Spiegel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

³⁰ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1985), p. 126.

however, this is not a recently formulated position: ‘In 1767, the French philosopher Denis Diderot said that landscape paintings were hung on the walls of salons by city dwellers in order to compensate for their loss of contact with nature’.²⁸ From a television studies perspective this is very similar to those ‘television as window on the world’ arguments (at their most developed and sophisticated in the work of William Boddy and Lynn Spiegel²⁹), in which television promises a fantasy of ‘armchair travel’ by bringing ‘the outside world into the private home’. If this is so, we might understand the television set showing extended montages of landscape imagery as a form of *trompe l’oeil*, a faux-window from which the urban viewer may view or consume the rural. As Raymond Williams has argued, ‘the very idea of landscape implies separation and observation’,³⁰ the positioning of the HDTV viewer in the domestic space cum gallery emphasizes this tension between proximity and distance in relation to landscape spectacle. Indeed, the use of intradiegetic frames in ITV’s ‘vote for your favourite landscape’ show, *Britain’s Favourite View*, supports this reading of television’s landscape images as *trompe l’oeil* (where we see the intersection of artwork and window). At the end of each segment of the programme, in which a celebrity talks about and ‘takes in’ a particular view, the view is framed by a semi-transparent, bevelled CGI frame as the culmination of the presenter’s endeavours to persuade us of the image’s status as Britain’s favourite view, as the title of the view is also displayed diegetically. This is seen, for example, in the final shot of Des Lynam’s championing of the Seven Sisters in Kent, preceded by a montage of landscape shots accompanied by Elgar’s ‘Land of Hope and Glory’ and Lynam reading Kipling’s poem ‘Sussex’ (figure 5).

This ‘framing moment’ thus leads to the centre of this analysis of landscape television. In this mode of programme making, a variety of audiovisual strategies seek, at various points in the episode, to halt the narrative progression of programmes such as *Coast*, *Wainwright Walks*, *A Picture of Britain* and *Britain’s Favourite View* in order to appeal to a *contemplative viewer* who appreciates a televisual form of landscape

Fig. 5. *Britain's Favourite View*: the CGI frame. © ITV.



spectacle on an aesthetic level. In the context of the advent of HDTV, these moments have been particularly emphasized and extended. Lefebvre's work on landscape and film is extremely useful here, in his discussion of two possible modes of spectatorial activity in relation to the viewing of a single film: 'a *narrative mode* and a *spectacular mode*'. Lefebvre states:

The contemplation of the setting [in the spectacular mode] frees it briefly from its narrative function (but perhaps, in some cases, only for the length of a thought); for one instant, the natural, outdoor setting ... is considered in its own right, as landscape.³¹

31 Lefebvre, 'Between setting and landscape in the cinema', p. 29.

In the contemporary landscape factual entertainment programme, then, narrative progression is frequently slowed or halted to enable contemplative viewing.

An example of this spectacular mode of contemplation can be seen in the first episode of *Wainwright Walks*, produced by the aerial filmmaking company Skyworks for BBC4. This is an interesting programme for this study. The thirty-minute episodes are each based around the presenter, Julia Bradbury, completing one of the walks from Alfred Wainwright's famous guidebooks to the Lake District; as such, it is a rather sparse, empty programme which punctuates sequences of Bradbury's walking (and talking to camera) with shots of the surrounding scenery. Wainwright's walks were the subject of a previous series of programmes made for the BBC in the 1980s and distributed on VHS by Striding Edge Productions in the 1990s (a production company based in the Lakes, headed by Eric Robson who also presented the series). These programmes focused affectionately on documenting Wainwright, and filmed the scenery accordingly from a human point of view, with the man himself discussing favourite views on camera. In contrast, the later Wainwright series dwells on more spectacular, omniscient views of the landscape,

Fig. 6. *Wainwright Walks*: the contemplative view. © Skyworks.



frequently shot from a helicopter; even when the filming is not taken from an aerial perspective, the scale, pace and clarity of the images differentiate it from its predecessor. In the first episode of *Wainwright Walks*, on leaving Low Wax Knot on her ascent of the Haystacks, Bradbury exclaims: 'You wouldn't think the view could get any better ... but it does'. What follows in the next sequence is a slow track down the hills, eventually showing an extreme wide shot of Bradbury sitting 'alone' within the landscape, accompanied by her voiceover describing Wainwright's passion for the landscape, then the voice of actor Nik Wood-Jones reading Wainwright's words in a rumbling Lancastrian burr ('the magical atmosphere of the lakes, the silence of lonely hills, the dawn chorus of birdsong, silver cascades, dancing and leaping down bracken steeples, and the symphonies of murmuring streams'). This camera movement finishes on a closeup of Bradbury gazing into the distance, held for a quiet five seconds, after which the shot moves out to a slightly wider profile shot during which she extols the virtues of walking alone and the serenity and peacefulness of 'being alone' and having the luxury of 'all this space'. Whilst Bradbury's solitude is, of course, an illusion (the presence of the crew denied by her dialogue), the following repeated sequence of her sitting as a solitary figure in the landscape (figure 6) tracks off into another 'appreciative view' of the distant hills and is accompanied by a quiet crescendo of strings and piano. This combination of enraptured presenter, slowly moving tracking shot around the landscape and orchestral accompaniment all denote that this, to borrow a term from Charlotte Brunson's work on cinematic 'empty spaces', is a 'hesitation' in the televisual image;³² a point where the emptiness of landscape, or what Lefebvre calls 'space freed from eventhood',³³ allows for moments of contemplation or breaks from narrative progression, both when Bradbury herself is resting (as in this moment) and beyond. The onscreen presenter is, of course, critically important in the landscape programme, pointing the viewer towards what Lefebvre calls 'intentional landscape':³⁴ spectacular imagery marked out as landscape by the programme makers,

32 Charlotte Brunson, 'Towards a history of empty spaces', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2007), p. 219.

33 Lefebvre, 'Between setting and landscape in the cinema', p. 22.

34 Ibid., p. 30.

35 Ibid., p. 33.

rather than that which is discovered or understood by the viewer as landscape without any obvious framing of it as such. Bradbury in *Wainwright Walks*, Nicholas Crane and colleagues in *Coast*, Dimpleby in *A Picture of Britain*, Andrew Marr in *Britain from Above* and a plethora of celebrity presenters in *Britain's Favourite View* figure as what Lefebvre has seen in the fiction film as a 'character enraptured by the natural space offered to their gaze [that] can lead the spectator to contemplate the same space as an autonomous landscape'.³⁵ The relationship between presenter and camerawork specific to these programmes is characterized by a certain hesitation, a *slowness*; the presenter leading the camera to allow the viewer to linger on the landscape. This compares to, for example, Schama's presentation and negotiation of landscape in *A History of Britain*, in which he often strides around beautiful landscapes to illustrate a historical moment, encouraging us to 'imagine' – sometimes with the help of CGI or images of art and artefacts captured by a rostrum camera – rather than to simply 'look'.

36 Holdsworth, "'Slow television'" and Stephen Poliakoff's *Shooting the Past*, discusses Poliakoff's nomination in detail.

37 All quotes from Richard Mervyn are taken from a personal interview with the author, 8 September 2009.

38 The idea of a Windows-based computer photo montage in television's handling of still images has also been discussed in Jason Jacobs's comments on the 'Ken Burns effect' in his 'Television's illustrated talks', *Critical Studies in Television*, June 2009, <<http://www.criticalstudiesintelevisiion.com/index.php?siid=11221>> accessed 16 March 2011.

39 Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1960), p. 47.

40 All quotes from Steve Evanston are taken from a personal interview with the author, 16 October 2009.

Given that many of these programmes feature presenters walking through or physically exploring land (and landscape), it is unsurprising that the adjectives one wishes to use to describe the camerawork here are associated with that activity: the camera lingers, it meanders and rambles over this space, inviting a contemplative gaze. This is 'slow television' for the contemplative viewer, to borrow Steven Poliakoff's phrase;³⁶ indeed, the executive producer of *Wainwright Walks*, Richard Mervyn, was keen to stress that this slowness was part of the programme's appeal to an older audience, equating a faster pace with the youth programming of BBC3 as opposed to BBC4, the original home of his programme.³⁷ We might go further in interpreting this as a kind of 'screensaver TV' that to a large extent privileges the extended montage of moving images of landscape set to orchestral music.³⁸ In fact, across nearly all genres of programming, *montage* is to television spectacle what the long take and wide angle are to filmic spectacle; the extended, dialogue-free montage asks the viewer to *look* rather than to follow narration or dialogue. Sometimes this moment is also an invitation to the viewer to make creative connections between scenes and images in order to tell a story, frequently at the end of an episode (for the sake of clarity, 'narrative montage'); however, at other times we are invited to simply look and enjoy, to sit back and relax, to contemplate a series of beautiful or striking images on screen – the 'spectacular montage'.

In these landscape programmes then, spectacular montages punctuate every episode: they are montages of movement, travelling shots, which dwell on what Kant describes as the 'noble sublime', that version of the sublime which is accompanied by a sense of 'quiet wonder' rather than the 'certain dread or melancholy' of the terrifying sublime.³⁹ This quiet wonder is perhaps rather more suited to cosy, *televisual* images of landscape. There is a sumptuous and rather sensual quality to this imagery, referred to by the series producer of *Coast*, Steve Evanston, as 'landscape porn'.⁴⁰ In interview, Evanston acknowledged that the series

oscillates between presenting the coastal landscape as a setting for the variety of social, natural and geographical histories told and as purely for visual viewing pleasure:

Aerial photography is not only used for visual impact, stunning shots of Lulworth Cove or some amazing Beachy Head, you know, or somewhere where you just want to ... basically its almost like kind of landscape porn, and you're just kind of looking at it going 'Wow, look at that', but we also try and use the aerials as embedded in the stories.

You can see this pull between narrative montage and spectacular montage throughout *Coast*, as the aerial photography shifts, sometimes imperceptibly, between 'landscape porn' and landscape embedded in storytelling (or spectacular montage and narrative montage). Porn is a perhaps a useful point of comparison given that the spectacular landscape imagery of *Coast* and other programmes in this cycle appears to teeter on the brink of the sensational and the gratuitous.

The production economy of these programmes, in relation to the expensive aerial photography on which they rely so heavily, is interesting for a number of reasons. Programmes such as *Coast* and *Britain's Favourite View* 'buy in' their aerials from companies such as Castle Air, Flying Pictures and Skyworks, and the production companies negotiate the rights to reuse the aerials beyond their original use. The BBC owns the rights to *Coast's* aerials, produced by Castle Air, for example, while Skyworks nearly always retains the rights on its footage, and makes a lot of its revenue through archive sales rather than the production of new programmes and footage. Thus across television production, in as many genres as use aerial footage of landscape, an image repertoire of stock shots and standalone sequences has begun to develop, which means that the same spectacular montage may be seen time and again outside of its original broadcast context (footage from *Coast* has recently been used in programmes as diverse as *Songs of Praise* [BBC1, 1961–] and *Flog It* [BBC2, 2002–], for example). Extracted from its narrative framework, the aerial landscape montage sequence moves beyond its use as a shorthand device for establishing place to being more obviously intended for the production of visual pleasure. Even a programme like *Wainwright Walks*, commissioned by BBC4 from Skyworks, relies heavily on what we might term the recycling of spectacle: Richard Mervyn, the company's founding director, reported that the first series was made up of about forty per cent of their stock archived footage rather than aerials that had been shot especially for the programme. Both of the interviews conducted in relation to this research also emphasized the skill and creativity required of the small number of film pilots and specialist aerial camera operators working in this area. Mervyn, for example, argued that 'in a sense the pilot is not just a pilot, he's the grip, the helicopter is the dolly, a crane and a tripod, so you must consider that the pilot is part of the creative team'. Given that a relatively small number of flying and shooting experts are working across a range of programmes to produce a vast amount of footage, it is perhaps

unsurprising that television's aerial landscapes, seen in genres from cookery programmes to reality shows like *The Apprentice* (Mark Burnett Productions/Talkback for BBC, 2005–), are also marked by a certain visual homogeneity.

Aside from the spectacle of aerial photography that dominates this cycle of programmes, we might also locate the production of visual pleasure within HD television's spectacular landscape documentaries in the use of satellite and computer-generated imagery. If, as a kind of middlebrow landscape art of constantly moving pictures, these programmes have pretensions to the representation of the 'natural beauty' of land rendered as landscape, then they also feature a dazzling array of what we might call special effects or trick shots. CGI is frequently used to draw further attention to the pictorial qualities of this branch of factual entertainment, as seen in the CGI 'frame' example from *Britain's Favourite View*, discussed above, or in the opening title sequence of *A Picture of Britain*, where a watercolour painting is 'magically' completed in order to draw our attention to the process by which the British view becomes landscape. As Dimpleby looks on in the left-hand foreground and subsequently moves out of the shot as it reframes, his view of some 'typically British' rolling hills is replaced by a painted image of the same scene which slowly 'appears' over the original image. Computer-generated footage is also used to draw on the spectacular imagery of other media forms, specifically Hollywood cinema, to 'sex up' a potentially visually uninteresting story – as in *Coast's* huge-scale CGI recreation of the Titanic in a story about Belfast shipbuilding in its first season, or the tsunami created for the opening episode on Shetland in its third.

More prominently, however, the programmes also employ what we might call a 'Google Earth' aesthetic through the insertion of computer-generated and satellite imagery, and in doing so make a visual point about the relationship between topography, satellite photography and landscape art. The handling of the map as an aesthetic object was explored most recently and most thoroughly in the BBC4 series *The Beauty of Maps* (Tern Television for BBC4, 2010); arguably this series was a direct descendant of the landscape programmes at the centre of this analysis that frequently feature digitally created maps at the centre of their narratives, or at punctuating points throughout them, and which often handle the representation of cartography in explicitly spectacular ways. The most obvious examples of this are the vertiginous zooms into a locating point of the map of the British Isles that punctuate each season of *Coast*, and which also dominate *Britain from Above* (the opening episode of this series draws particularly heavily on satellite and CGI images of the landscape as map in tracking the movement of various forms of transport around the UK). In the example of the characteristic *Coast* 'zoom', a dazzling topographical image maps the British landscape into a visual system which proposes that new technologies of seeing and surveillance have land, rather than landscape, absolutely covered, and that 'land' (and also

Fig. 7. *Coast*: the Google Earth view.
© BBC.



‘terrain’, ‘territory’) has entered into, and been processed by, technology, a technology that ‘stands for’ or represents systems of knowledge and power in a rather Orwellian sense. Simultaneously, though, this is a beautiful image which offers a moment of heightened and exhilarating visual pleasure, showcasing the possibilities of digital satellite photography and drawing on the popularity of the ‘Google Earth’ image to locate one’s place in the world (Google Earth, I would argue, has become an internet leisure/‘play’ application for the majority of its users). As geographers Martin Dodge and Chris Perkins argue:

In the past, satellite imagery was mainly deployed as part of rational scientific discourse, to target enemy facilities, manage environments, monitor land-use change, or as evidential support for planning enforcement. Increasingly, however, different social groups are deploying high-resolution satellite imagery in new ways. Actors in the process now range from mass-media, to artistic practitioners ... to everyday leisure users. ... The avowedly naturalistic look of the virtual globe shrouded in satellite imagery is beginning to replace the world map of nation-states as the default meta-geography of the media.⁴¹

Paul Kingsbury and John Paul Jones III go further in describing Google Earth specifically as ‘a Dionysian entity, that is, the projection of an uncertain orb spangled with vertiginous paranoia, frenzied navigation, jubilatory dissolution, and intoxicating giddiness’.⁴² In *Coast*, the zoom into the map of Britain provides the viewer with an exhilarating rush – Kingsbury and Jones’s ‘intoxicating giddiness’ – as if the journey down from space forms the first step of the journey around Britain that is about to begin; it therefore has both narrative and spectacular function, and figures topography as a sensuous and aesthetic and *spectacular experience* (figure 7). Here we see television’s landscape art producing the same kind of ‘topographical sensibility’ that dominated Flemish landscape painting in the sixteenth century; the map is intertwined with a vision of ‘landscape’.

To conclude, it is obvious that there is a great deal more to say about these programmes, not least the ways in which they engage in the creation

⁴¹ Martin Dodge and Chris Perkins, ‘The “view from nowhere”? Spatial politics and cultural significance of high-resolution satellite imagery’, *Geoforum*, vol. 40, no. 4 (2009), pp. 497–501.

⁴² Paul Kingsbury and John Paul Jones III, ‘Walter Benjamin’s Dionysian adventures on Google Earth’, *Geoforum*, vol. 40, no. 4 (2009), pp. 502–13.

43 John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage, 1990). Andrew Higson makes a similar argument about the representation of rural spaces in British cinema in his 'A green and pleasant land: rural spaces and British cinema', in Catherine Fowler and Gillian Hellfield (eds), *Representing the Rural: Space, Place, and Identity in Films About the Land* (Detroit, IL: Wayne State University Press, 2006), pp. 240–55.

44 My thanks to Hannah Andrews at the University of Warwick for pointing this out to me.

and romanticization of a 'timeless' unchanging Britain and, by association, British national identity. Furthermore, the environmental conscience of some of these programmes (particularly *Coast* and *Britain from Above*), or the rather condescending way in which programmes like *A Picture of Britain* deal with the question of rural tourism and its environmental impact, seem at odds with their visualization of what John Urry has called 'the tourist gaze';⁴³ they often look and sound like holiday programmes, and the economy of the 'view' is always an underlying issue in this programming which both expresses discomfort at the commercialization of the British landscape whilst cashing in on this very thing. In fact the rise of these programmes on British television coincides with the decline of the foreign holiday programme,⁴⁴ which perhaps reflects the current economic climate of the UK and its broadcasters, as well as the middle classes' increased consciousness of the questionable ethics of international travel in relation to the issue of climate change. The landscape programme thus revitalizes the spectacular escapism of the television holiday programme for the environmentally conscious viewer.

It might also be argued that what is on offer here are easy pleasures in landscape in programmes that ignore or 'fudge' more difficult questions about *territory* and the changing face of plural national identities, or that skirt these questions by focusing on an appreciation of a series of views. In abstracting landscape from the issue of territory in the episode of *Coast* about Northern Ireland ('The peaceful landscape masks a history of turbulence'), the programme makers seem to be suggesting that landscape can be set apart from culture and politics, when in fact this could not be further from the truth. Evanson, series producer of *Coast*, feels that the programme manages to speak to the viewer about national identity in sensitive and reassuring ways, and argues that this is important in what he characterizes as 'troubled times':

At the time [of the first broadcast], it was the time of the London bombings. I remember being in an edit when the London bombs went off, 'cause there was kind of chaos, we were worried about our family and friends, and you know there we were editing a show about Northern Ireland ... it was quite ironic. So *Coast* tapped into a kind of feel-good factor, people wanted to feel good in slightly uncertain times. ... It celebrated the British experience without being triumphalistic about it.

Whilst I have argued here that a 'spectacular view' on television is designed to appeal in a number of ways to a contemplative viewer watching beautiful images in spectacular clarity, the question of what else this contemplation might distract us from is one that requires further thought and debate.

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The Film Festivals dossier: Introduction

DAVID ARCHIBALD AND MITCHELL MILLER

Film festivals have become an increasingly important area for film scholars. An expanding field of scholarship on film distribution and exhibition, cultural policy formulation and media industries at national and international level has made it increasingly important to investigate the role played by annual festivals that exhibit films for both public and industry audiences. Since the pioneering work of Bill Nichols, researchers have come to recognize that film festivals are not just an adjunct to other activities but a phenomenon in their own right.¹ While interlocking with a number of important areas of cinema both culturally and industrially, film festivals possess their own economies, social economic drivers, professional and political dynamics, and agendas. Following Nichols, Daniel Dayan, in his seminal anthropological study of Sundance, has characterized festivals as serving distinct groups with diverse interests, while Julian Stringer has developed a series of theoretical approaches to festival studies that has given shape to much subsequent debate around the national versus the international role of these events.² Multidisciplinary approaches, encompassing socioeconomics, textual studies, historiography and anthropology, are a feature of these early works and of the subsequent scholarship. With film festivals proliferating at an extraordinary rate – a report commissioned by former director of the Edinburgh International Film Festival Hannah McGill, who reflects on her experiences in this dossier, found that somewhere in the world a film festival opens every thirty-six hours – there is no shortage of cases available for study.³

This exponential growth in film festivals has been mirrored by a growing body of research in the area. In 2008 Marijke de Valck and Skadi

¹ Bill Nichols, 'Global image consumption in the age of late capitalism', *East-West Film Journal*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1994), pp. 68–85.

² Daniel Dayan, 'Looking for Sundance: the social construction of a film festival', in Ib Bondebjerg (ed.), *Moving Images, Culture and the Mind* (Luton: University of Luton Press, 2000) pp. 43–52; Julian Stringer, 'Regarding film festivals' (Dissertation: Indiana University, 2003).

³ 'Standing out from the herd, a report by Split Screen Data Ltd', November 2006.

4 <<http://www.filmfestivalresearch.org/>> accessed 21 March 2011.

5 Dina Iordanova, 'Notes on film festivals vs industry events', *DinaView*, 30 September 2010, <<http://www.dinaview.com/?p=1490>> accessed 21 March 2011.

6 Matthew Lloyd, *How the Movie Brats Took Over Edinburgh* (St Andrews: St Andrews Film Studies, 2011).

Loist founded the Film Festival Research Network and created an annotated, and regularly updated, bibliography of film festival research.⁴ Another major impetus has come from the Department of Film Studies at the University of St Andrews: in April 2009 it held an International Film Festivals Workshop and subsequently published *The Film Festivals Yearbook*, which has acted as a marker for current trends in film festival research. The first volume interrogates the global proliferation of festivals and how cultural policy shapes film exhibition and distribution networks; the second, through research on funding models and cultural policies, examines the formation of 'imagined' communities on a transnational level, encompassing perceived groupings of nations in Africa, Asia or Central America, and the notion of diasporas and ethnic identities; while the third continues the theme of transnational cinemas to look at film festivals and East Asia. The notion of the 'transnational' and of identity building through festivals surfaces in a number of the articles; and editor Dina Iordanova, who keeps a regular blog on film festival studies, relates that these transnational events, with their heavy industry involvement and carefully orchestrated interactions with press and public, have sparked further debate around what qualifies as a 'festival', and how this differs from a public relations or industry event from which the general public is largely excluded. Iordanova notes, for instance, that the curator Neil Young has questioned whether Cannes, which excludes the public from most of its screenings, qualifies as a festival at all.⁵ This dossier pays accordingly close attention to the organization and funding arrangements for festivals, which remain an underdeveloped research area.

The category of 'film festival', perhaps unsurprisingly, defies a single definition, ranging as it does from the grassroots digital festivals created by small networks of independent and amateur filmmakers, or the wilfully ramshackle Ballerina Ballroom Cinema of Dreams organized by Mark Cousins and Tilda Swinton, to the vast institutional machinery of Sundance, or the critical mass of industry involvement found in Cannes. Other academic institutions have also sought to direct and guide research into festivals, often in partnership with their object of enquiry. The Edinburgh International Film Festival (EIFF) has been notable for its openness to discussion about its past and for admitting access to its archive through, for instance, a current Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded collaborative PhD with the University of Glasgow. Matthew Lloyd's history of the EIFF in the 1970s, *How the Movie Brats Took over Edinburgh*, further augments the study and understanding of the Edinburgh case.⁶

In debating the role of festivals, researchers have corralled the work of earlier scholars and, somewhat inevitably given the changes evident within their individual histories, returned to the guiding principles of how these festivals are classified and constituted, and how their original charters have shaped their future development. These concerns emerge throughout the essays presented here, which have been selected to demonstrate the range and diversity of enquiries in and around film

- 7 Marijke de Valck, *Film Festivals: from European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007).

festival scholarship. Felicia Chan links the coming of age of festival studies to an increased understanding of how the socioeconomic processes behind film festivals shape the aesthetics of the film itself. Chan argues that many films are made with the explicit aim of being 'discovered' at a festival. This is a process that, in turn, creates and consolidates aesthetic trends that other filmmakers attempt to emulate. She explores this phenomenon through the construction of national cinemas and processes of selection, distribution and exhibition that claim, rightly or wrongly, to speak for a 'body politic' – however that may be defined. Chan also references de Valck's critique of the 'dogma of discovery' that has guided most film festivals since the 1980s.⁷ Responding to wider shifts within the film industry, Chan writes that festivals 'began to reconstitute what defined the avant-garde, the experimental and the alternative film', and pursues this by questioning how 'film festival hierarchies' affect film selection and can consequently dictate the terms for exhibition, potential distribution and, therefore, production; as she frames it, they 'feed the political economy of film production'.

In a very different context, Miriam Ross interrogates these political economies by exploring the involvement of film festivals as producers of cinematic works, focusing specifically on the Hubert Bals Fund based at the International Film Festival Rotterdam. As Ross shows, the fund does more than just provide money; it sets the criteria by which applicants are judged and is thus able to bring significant degrees of political and economic influence to bear on such productions. Ross argues that this entrenches views of 'first'- and 'third'-world cultures through a detailed analysis of two Hubert Bals-funded productions. Noting the relative lack of concern for distributing these films within Latin American countries themselves, raising important questions about the nature of audiences for films made for and by festivals, Ross also asks whether such institutions reinforce rather than challenge the unequal relationship between the so-called developed and developing worlds.

- 8 Kai Reichel-Heldt, *Filmfestivals in Deutschland: Zwischen kulturpolitischen Idealen und wirtschaftspolitischen Realitäten* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2007).

Skadi Loist attempts to answer one of the many questions industry professionals are posing to the academy as they contend with the great expansion and anticipated contraction of the international film festival circuit. Citing Braunschweig International Film Festival director Volker Kufahl's review of Kai Reichel-Heldt's *Film Festivals in Deutschland*,⁸ in which he called for more research into the precarious working conditions of film festival workers, Loist examines working conditions in two Hamburg-based queer film festivals. Workers in these festivals enter a field devoid of specific or formalized training that demands huge personal commitment and year-long work, yet with very little financial reward compared to the film and television industries. Introducing the sociological research of David Hesmondhalgh and Alexandra Manske into her exploration of the conditions endured by workers in creative and cultural industries, she draws a stark contrast with the policymakers' view of these sectoral workers as 'profitable'. This is linked, inevitably, to budgets and funding arrangements, not least the value placed on film

9 Richard Porton (ed.), *Dekalog 3: on Film Festivals* (London: Wallflower, 2009).

festivals by movers and shakers in cultural politics. Her essay sets a marker for additional research into labour conditions in the 'creative industries' and the link between these and the 'symbolic' role that is played by many specialist film festivals.

Questions of what constitutes a body politic and who speaks for it, initially raised in Chan's essay, also emerge in our own contribution to this dossier, which offers an account of a political controversy over financial support provided by the Israeli government to international film festivals to facilitate the attendance of Israeli filmmakers. As we discuss, Israel has been under cultural and economic boycott by pro-Palestinian campaigners since 2006, and the acceptance of Israeli government funds by festival organizers has been viewed as breaking this boycott. The success of Israeli cinema internationally has made the means by which Israeli artists attend cultural events an increasingly important question, one that consumed a number of 'middle-ranking' film festivals – such as Edinburgh and Melbourne – over the course of 2009. We offer a narrative of the controversy, one which began quietly at a small French film festival in January 2009 only to gain momentum as major industry figures such as Ken Loach became involved. By the time it reached Toronto the issue had moved on from funding plane tickets to the ethics of programming major festival sidebars that promoted the 'Brand Israel' campaign. Our history of the controversy shows how political acuity is increasingly important in film festival programming and organization.

Richard Porton's 2009 edited collection of essays on film festivals highlights the contribution that can be made to the debate by industry insiders and film critics.⁹ In that spirit we conclude the dossier with a contribution from Hannah McGill, who reflects on her nine years' involvement in festivals as critic, programmer and artistic director of the EIFF. Just as scholars have come together to consider the film festival seriously, McGill questions whether the research site, as it currently stands, will survive much longer. Discussing the effects of the UK Film Council's demise on events such as EIFF, McGill argues that even within the closeted world of the film festival the unsustainability of these expensive, 'ceremonial' events is increasingly understood, if not always vocalized. With public funding likely to disappear or depreciate, corporate sponsorship may appear to offer a solution to the funding gap; but this – in an echo of the political concerns raised in our own essay – can come with 'conditions costing more than the sponsorship is worth'. With finances in chaos, maintaining the original values of film festivals – those organizing principles mentioned above – will become increasingly difficult and possibly antithetical to the demands of the audience. McGill ends by considering very different examples of film festivals – the Ballerina Ballroom and the specialist fan convention cum film festival, and what these might augur for the future. The indications are that the question of what a film festival actually is – and thus what film festival scholarship purports to describe and understand – will not be answered definitively any time soon. But we offer up this dossier as a contribution to the debate.

The international film festival and the making of a national cinema

FELICIA CHAN

The international film festival often appears to function as a cosmopolitan space in which spectators are encouraged to participate in a kind of concentrated cultural tour of the world; it is also a space that regulates – in accordance with various social, economic, political and cultural forces – what is allowed to flow through it. Apart from celebrating individual films and directors, festivals often showcase various bodies of work defined as cinema emerging from particular nations, more usually referred to as ‘national cinemas’.¹ This essay offers some initial thoughts on how the structures, conditions and contexts of festivals can impact on the films that emerge from them – films which may sometimes be seen as representative of a particular national cinema. Rather than address how national cinemas are represented in the festival circuit, however, I explore the limits of constituting the national in a manner which fails to take into account the contingencies of festival histories and hierarchies in the politics of film selection.

While there are apparently between five hundred and one thousand film festivals in any given year, the typology is complex and there is no real consensus on what an ‘international film festival’ actually is, though there seems to be a general understanding that film festivals exist as ‘an alternative distribution network ... providing audiences with opportunities to enjoy commercially unviable films projected in a communal space – films that most communities, even the most cosmopolitan, otherwise would not have the opportunity to see’.² But who decides, in these communities, what may be screened within the festivals and what may later have commercial and cultural lives outside of the

¹ For various configurations of national cinemas, see, for example, Stephen Crofts, ‘Reconceptualising national cinema/s’, in Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen (eds), *Theorising National Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 2006), pp. 44–58.

² Mark Peranson, ‘First you get the power, then you get the money: two models of film festivals’, in Richard Porton (ed.), *Dekalog 3: on Film Festivals* (London: Wallflower, 2009), p. 23.

3 Ibid., p. 35.

4 Marijke de Valck, *Film Festivals: from European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), p. 20.

5 Ibid., p. 175.

6 Ibid., p. 177.

7 Ibid., p. 176.

8 See Bill Nichols, 'Discovering form, inferring meaning: new cinemas and the film festival circuit', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 3 (1994), pp. 16–30.

9 de Valck, *Film Festivals*, p. 180.

10 Hubert Bals Fund, *International Film Festival Rotterdam*, <http://www.filmfestivalrotterdam.com/en/about/hubert_bals_fund.aspx> accessed 21 March 2011.

'festival circuit'? Mark Peranson writes of the various 'interest groups that must be appeased ... [which can] influence what films and what kinds of films are going to be screened at a festival'.³ An example of such influence is the 'dogma of discovery' that Marijke de Valck notes as having become central to festivals, especially from the 1980s onwards when 'the festival phenomenon [was] sweepingly professionalized and institutionalized'.⁴ This occurred partly because of Hollywood's response to the rise of video as a new threat. Through independent studios like Miramax, Hollywood released specialist, 'quality', but still widely appealing films on the festival circuit – *The English Patient* (Anthony Minghella, USA/UK, 1996) and *Shakespeare in Love* (John Madden, USA/UK, 1998) are two later examples – and festivals began to reconstitute what defined the avant-garde, the experimental and the alternative film. They began to look beyond Western Europe and North America, and this period saw the emergence of many new 'new wave cinemas' emerging from countries such as Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia, Hungary, West Germany, Brazil, Cuba, Argentina, Japan and Russia. As pressure grew in the search for 'mind-blowing discoveries similar to the one generated by the archetypal French New Wave',⁵ a 'second set of new waves' in the 1980s emerged from Taiwan, West Africa, Spain, Ireland, New Zealand, Iran and China, the last in the form of the Fifth Generation, whose output incidentally comprised 'no more than seven percent of the nation's annual production'.⁶ As de Valck puts it, each 'new wave' was always waiting to be discovered, and yet 'every new wave would inevitably have a limited life span at the festival circuit'.⁷

This drive for discovery, which has also been attributed to a deep cinephilia,⁸ when accompanied by power and influence can have a significant impact on national industries, as can be seen in the case of Rotterdam's Hubert Bals, who had a personal interest in Asian cinema. As a result Rotterdam still maintains a strong reputation for bringing in new films from Asia to Europe. The International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR) positions itself specifically as a cinephile's festival rather than a celebrity-driven one, priding itself on having no red carpet event and few celebrities. The festival is also dedicated to helping new filmmakers find their feet. Before his death in 1988, Bals established a film fund that was designed to support 'filmmakers from developing countries whose films are formally innovative, shed new light on their countries of origin, and/or contribute to the improvement of the local film industries'.⁹ According to the official website, 'Since the Fund started in 1988, close to 600 projects from independent filmmakers in Asia, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Africa and Latin America have received support. Approximately 80% of these projects have been realised or are currently in production.'¹⁰ I was at the 2007 festival when Tan Chui Mui's Mandarin-language debut film, *Love Conquers All* (Netherlands/Malaysia, 2006), won Rotterdam's Tiger Award for Best Feature. It was proudly announced at the screening that although the Malaysian director was awarded €10,000 by the Hubert Bals Fund specifically for script development, she had utilized the money to

11 Robert Koehler, 'Cinephilia and film festivals', in Porton (ed.), *Dekalog 3*, p. 94.

12 Steve Rose, 'The great fall of China', *Guardian*, 1 August 2002, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/aug/01/china.film/print>> accessed 21 March 2011.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

make the entire film. Robert Koehler goes as far as to say that it is 'by now widely accepted that without Rotterdam's Hubert Bals Fund ... a significant number in the global "margins" would have been unable to make films at all'.¹¹

Exciting as these developments may be, when these new discoveries find themselves lined up under national or cultural labels, in the form of seasons, retrospectives and showcases, we need to consider how discourses frame themselves around these works and construct them as representatives of a particular national consciousness. In other words, do nations create cinema or does cinema create nations? Let us consider the body of work produced by a group of Chinese filmmakers who came to be known as the Fifth Generation in the 1980s and 1990s. Hailed through the festival circuit as bringing a freshness to film language, their work became canonized as part of a movement described as the 'New Chinese Cinema'. By the early 2000s, however, Steve Rose of the *Guardian* was proclaiming the movement's demise, lamenting that 'mainland Chinese cinema had faded into insignificance' in the wake of transnational hits like *Wohu Canglong/Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Ang Lee, Taiwan/Hong Kong/USA/China, 2000).¹² Without acknowledging any other body of work that may also share the nomenclature of 'Chinese cinema', Rose attributed this decline to the five-year absence of the Fifth Generation's most well-known director, Zhang Yimou, following the ban on his film *Huozhe/To Live* (China/Hong Kong, 1994):

By the time Zhang returned, the arthouse baton had moved west. International audiences were now getting worthier, riskier and more exotic cinema from modest Iranian directors such as Abbas Kiarostami and Mohsen Makhmalbaf. Zhang's comeback film, *Not One Less*, appeared to acknowledge this. It featured struggling children in poor rural settings: it was Kiarostami in China.¹³

While Rose rightly points out how audience tastes can be arbitrary, his article does not address the structures which enable personalities like Zhang, Kiarostami and Makhmalbaf to appear and disappear on the circuit. Rose accounts for his disappointment with the Sixth Generation, following the Fifth, by suggesting that their films have won prizes not on their visual merit but for being perceived as somehow 'worthy':

The Sixth Generation's films also won prizes at the festivals (when they could get them out of China) – but perhaps out of respect for the personal risk involved in making them rather than the experience of watching them. These films' drabness, slowness, emotional detachment and heavy cigarette consumption corresponded to the reality of present-day China, but not necessarily the tastes of international audiences. If the Fifth Generation's films were like a stay in the Beijing Hilton, the Sixth Generation experience was like a night in a backpackers' hostel.¹⁴

What constitutes the shift in preferences for one version of 'China' against the next? Who and what shapes those preferences? The 'international

- 15 Ragan Rhyne, 'Film festival circuits and stakeholders', in Dina Iordanova and Ragan Rhyne (eds), *Film Festival Yearbook I: the Festival Circuit* (St Andrews: St Andrews Film Studies, 2009), p. 9.

- 16 'International film festivals', *Fédération Internationale des Associations de Producteurs de Films*, <<http://www.fiapf.org/intfilmfestivals.asp>> accessed 21 March 2011.

- 17 Jeremy Kay, 'Losique wins back FIAPF accreditation for Montreal', *Screen Daily*, 21 July 2005, <<http://www.screendaily.com/losique-wins-back-fiapf-accreditation-for-montreal/4023810.article>> accessed 21 March 2011.

- 18 For a comprehensive overview of the importance of the festival markets, see Peranson, 'First you get the power', pp. 23–37.

audiences' that Rose refers to, or imagines, are probably those most like himself – middle-class, western-educated cultural consumers who may pride themselves on a literacy informed by a particular cosmopolitan openness.

The various 'stakeholders' in film festivals that Ragan Rhyne identifies, a group including 'filmmakers and studios, journalists and press agents, professionals and programmers, local cultural councils and supranational agencies, tourist boards, cinephiles and others',¹⁵ can wield enormous power, and perhaps none more so than the Paris-based *Fédération Internationale des Associations de Producteurs de Films* (FIAPF), the International Federation of Film Producers' Associations. The organization was asked about thirty years ago by industry personnel to regulate the numerous festivals according to a set of standards; it created in its wake a hierarchy of festivals for whose attention film producers compete. FIAPF is made up of twenty-five producers' organizations from twenty-two countries on four continents, priding itself on its 'global reach'. Its role as 'a regulator of international film festivals' is largely self-appointed and it operates on 'a trust contract between those festivals and the film industry at large'.¹⁶ Out of the thousands of festivals only about fifty are currently accredited, and except for a few permanent ones, like Cannes and Berlin, the list varies from year to year. FIAPF insists that its members adhere to a strict code, the violation of which may result in ejection. Approval must be sought for changes to festival dates, for instance, for in an increasingly crowded festival calendar a timetable clash can hinder or disrupt the circulation of film prints as well as the global traffic flow of industry personnel and press corps. In 2003 the Montreal World Film Festival was one such casualty when its director changed the dates and caused it to clash with Venice and Toronto. It was brought back into the fold when it changed its dates again to rectify the situation, though this meant it then had to compete for audiences with a new upstart in its own backyard, the New Montreal FilmFest.¹⁷

FIAPF also regulates competition criteria, and the number of festivals accredited as Competitive Feature Film Festivals is surprisingly small. In 2010 there were only thirteen: the 'Big Three', Berlin, Cannes and Venice, are regular fixtures; the others, Shanghai, Moscow, Karlovy Vary, Locarno, Montreal, San Sebastian, Warsaw, Tokyo, Mar del Plata and Cairo, vary from year to year. However, as membership of FIAPF is voluntary and non-membership does not preclude festivals from instituting their own competition and criteria, as noted below, how does FIAPF wield its power? It does so by protecting the interests of film producers. The wider work of FIAPF is to regulate standards across film production, such as reproduction formats, copyright standards, and so on. It also lobbies legal institutions to tighten anti-piracy laws. Because FIAPF recognizes festivals that recognize the rights of producers, festivals accredited by FIAPF are likely to get the best films from producers, giving them a better market reputation and thus attracting more interest from the industry, the public, and so on.¹⁸ FIAPF also regulates press access,

19 Dina Iordanova, 'The film festival circuit', in Iordanova and Rhyne (eds), *Film Festival Yearbook I*, p. 27.

20 Ibid.

21 Peranson, 'First you get the power', p. 29.

22 Ibid., p. 30.

23 See 'Company profile', *FortissimoFilms*, <http://www.fortissimofilms.com/contact_profile.aspx> accessed 21 March 2011.

24 Iordanova, 'The film festival circuit', p. 27.

25 See Peranson, 'First you get the power', p. 32.

26 See Janet Harbord, 'Film festivals – time event', in Iordanova and Rhyne (eds), *Film Festival Yearbook I*, pp. 40–46.

27 Peranson, 'First you get the power', p. 24.

28 Paul Willemsen, 'Pesaro', *Framework*, nos 15/16/17 (1981), p. 96.

29 Ibid., p. 96.

intervenes in labour and industrial relations (of the seasonal workers and professionals at these festivals), and negotiates with the US guilds. Dina Iordanova notes that there are a number of festivals – notably Toronto, Sundance and Rotterdam – that have managed to 'routinely avoid seeking accreditation through FIAPF' in order to escape these conditions.¹⁹ These festivals succeed in this oppositional stance because they have 'managed to secure a relative permanence in their supply chain' by setting up their own networks with distributors.²⁰ Increasingly, sales agents are also beginning to stand in for government agencies in the acquisition of films for theatrical (or video or DVD) release. Peranson cites the example of Unifrance, which 'used to be the entity that film festivals would deal with if they wanted to show French films – now by and large it's the sales agents'.²¹ The largest of these, including 'Wild Bunch, Fortissimo, Celluloid Dreams ... Films Distribution, Pyramide, Bavaria-Film', may even 'control the art film market, often investing in films at production stage'.²² For instance, Fortissimo Films manages a large library of films, sometimes 'on behalf of independent producers and directors', including Hong Kong filmmaker Wong Kar Wai, Thai filmmaker Pen-ek Ratanaruang, Japanese filmmaker Shunji Iwai, Taiwanese filmmaker Tsai Ming-Liang, and US filmmaker Jim Jarmusch.²³ However, the relative lack of transparency to those outside the industry in the arrangements made between distributors, sales agents and festival programmers – widely noted to be both 'complex' and 'secretive'²⁴ as many deals are signed with a confidentiality agreement²⁵ – alongside the transient nature of festivals,²⁶ make sustained research difficult.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that film festivals can function as both cultural celebrations and marketplaces. Indeed, although Peranson notes that the dichotomy between the worlds of art and commerce in film, and in film festivals, is a false one,²⁷ festival programmers can often be faced with the difficult choice between culture and commerce. Paul Willemsen argues, in an article praising the counterhegemonic programming of the Pesaro film festival, that the real dilemma for festival organizers lies in establishing a cultural policy which enables festivals to negotiate the demands of industry, the ruling ideology and the arbiters of taste, such as journalists, reviewers, members of the academy, and so on. Willemsen sarcastically refers to this group as 'PIPs': 'Plain-clothes Ideological Police';²⁸ Rhyne's 'stakeholders'. A progressive cultural policy, according to Willemsen, is one 'which seeks to change these relations of power away from PIPs', even if such a move may be

seen as a directly political act requiring immediate and sustained retaliatory action from private enterprise, public institutions and, above all, from PIPs themselves (film prints are refused, subsidies are kept just below the level needed for survival, columnists attack the festival's 'elitism' and press for 'popular' policies which will not upset habits of consumption).²⁹

30 Ibid (my emphasis).

31 The fourth edition of the *Film Festival Yearbook*, to be published by St Andrews Film Studies in 2012, will be dedicated to the relationship between film festivals and activism.

32 de Valck, *Film Festivals*, p. 23 (my emphasis).

33 Ibid., p. 24.

34 Ibid.

35 Riefenstahl was a personal friend of Hitler, and *Olympia*, documenting the 1936 Berlin Olympics, was made at his request.

36 de Valck, *Film Festivals*, p. 48.

37 Ibid.

‘The real problem’, he writes, ‘is not how to develop a responsible, critical, festival policy, but how to *get away with* practising a cultural policy that is more than a token fig leaf for naked consumerism’.³⁰ The delicate balance required in satisfying both aims – of appearing to work with the ruling ideology in order to secure funding while attempting to resist its hegemony – will be familiar to many artists and cultural practitioners.³¹ In one edition of the Singapore International Film Festival, for which I used to work in the mid 1990s, the programmers decided specifically on the theme of ‘Sex in Cinema’, thereby deliberately challenging the mechanisms of control within the conservative, authoritarian state, which on the one hand maintains a tight rein on cultural activities and on the other wants to appear committed to the openness of the marketplace.

Nevertheless, the line between a genuine act of resistance and its gesture may be fine, and may shift in accordance with history and taste, and the question of how to explore the dialectic between the international and national dimensions of film exhibition at these festivals still remains. How does ‘the national’ emerge from a transient event that seeks to market itself as ‘international’? One route of enquiry may be to return to the historical roots of the modern film festival, and to consider the drive for internationalism inherently embedded in the national one. Although festivals with films have been recorded as existing alongside the birth of cinema at the turn of the twentieth century, the first modern film festival as we recognize it today began in Venice in 1932. At the time, the festival was already identified as an elite’s forum. As de Valck writes, ‘the festival was presented as an *international* and *glamorous* event attended by an *elite* audience of film professionals and the *beau monde*’.³² The year 1932 was also significant in that it saw the final conversion of the industry from the silent cinema to synchronized sound. Where the silent cinema travelled across linguistic communities by having intertitles translated and replaced, sound cinema had to address the issue of translation through dubbing and subtitling. One could thus argue that sound cinema created the need to recognize cultural difference; or as de Valck puts it, ‘film sound actually contributed to cultural distinction at the festivals’.³³ In 1932, Venice ‘combined the “international” with the “national” by inviting nations to participate in an international showcase where they could present a selection of their own finest films of the year’, and spoke to the ‘nationalistic sentiments that divided European nations at the time and simultaneously [addressed] the necessary international dimension of the film industry’.³⁴ However, it should be noted that in the early years the Venice festival was very much at the front of Mussolini’s fascist regime. In 1938 Venice awarded its main prize, the Mussolini Cup, to Leni Riefenstahl’s *Olympia* (Germany, 1938),³⁵ and a consolation prize to Walt Disney’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (David Hand, USA, 1937).³⁶ The other participating countries, led by France, Britain and the USA, read this as an act of prejudice and decided to found their own ‘counter-festival’ at Cannes, a resort town in the south of France.³⁷

38 See Peter Bart, *Cannes: Fifty Years of Sun, Sex and Celluloid* (New York, NY: Miramax, 1997).

39 de Valck, *Film Festivals*, p. 49.

40 Rhyne, 'Film festival circuits and stakeholders', pp. 11–12.

41 de Valck, *Film Festivals*, p. 53.

42 Ibid., p. 70.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid., p. 71.

45 Ibid.

When war broke out in Europe in 1939, plans for a fully-fledged festival at Cannes were suspended, but it returned in the postwar euphoria of 1946 and soon acquired a reputation for being the most glamorous festival of them all, equally famous for its wild parties and flagrant hedonism.³⁸ Festivals boomed all around Europe soon after – Locarno and Edinburgh in 1946, Brussels in 1947, Berlin in 1951³⁹ – and were welcomed as part of Europe's postwar efforts towards cultural and urban regeneration. These festivals also allowed European cinema to reclaim some of its cultural pride after the US film industry's domination during the war years,⁴⁰ offering filmmakers a space to develop their own individual 'national' artistry, and thereby providing the stimulation for the subsequent 'new wave' and avant-garde movements of the 1950s and 1960s. Film festivals thus began as 'showcases for national cinemas',⁴¹ if not 'nationalist' cinemas, and in many cases they provided the added motivation for investing in national industries.

In the 1970s the changing political climate saw the selection procedures of the major European festivals move away from national industries to include individual artistic achievement (coinciding with the rise of auteur theory and Hollywood's Film School Generation), and an interest in films from 'unfamiliar cinematic cultures, especially the ones sprouting from the revolutions in Third World countries'.⁴² Worldwide decolonization boosted the idea that cinema could also function as a force for political resistance.⁴³ Ironically, the hierarchy of festivals and festival competitions within the international circuit sometimes means that the best of these 'third-world' films may make their debut at the major European festivals, while the festivals in third-world countries themselves have to contend with debuting second- or third-tier films.⁴⁴ So what do the higher-ranked festivals confer and who ranks them? European and North American festivals, according to de Valck, 'offer more benefits in return for a première (prestige, network opportunities, etc.) and are therefore capable of attracting the most successful and established directors and films'.⁴⁵ For instance, although Chen Kaige's *Huang tudi/Yellow Earth* (China, 1984) premiered at the Hong Kong Film Festival, it was the Silver Leopard prize at Locarno the following year that really brought the film, and the Fifth Generation directors, to international attention. When Zhang Yimou's *Hong Gaoliang/Red Sorghum* (China, 1987) won the Golden Bear at the even more prestigious Berlin festival, the reputation of the Fifth Generation as being Chinese cinema's best was sealed. That several of these films were banned in China at the time added to their allure. At the same time, for many non-European filmmakers festivals can provide an opportunity to express their own ideas of a national consciousness that may otherwise not find an audience at home. The Taiwan New Cinema is a case in point. The films of some of its auteurs, Hou Hsiao-hsien, Tsai Ming-liang and Edward Yang, regularly receive more attention from arthouse cinephiles abroad than they do from audiences in Taiwan. The question remains as to how such a cinema, one which appears to be more 'national' abroad than at home, should be situated.

⁴⁶ Janet Harbord, *Film Cultures* (London: Sage, 2002), p. 73.

⁴⁷ Julian Stringer, 'Global cities and the international film festival economy', in Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice (eds), *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 134.

As film studies veers increasingly towards the study of transnational flows, the role that festivals play remains central. It is hoped that this essay, though brief, has succeeded in initiating dialogue over how we may engage the cluster of discourses, the 'force-field' that Janet Harbord identifies as being generated by the festival,⁴⁶ in order better to explore that 'cultural matrix'⁴⁷ established between the festival economy, film aesthetics and national imaginaries.

The film festival as producer: Latin American Films and Rotterdam's Hubert Bals Fund

MIRIAM ROSS

¹ Other notable funds are the Global Film Initiative (USA), the World Cinema Fund (Germany), Fonds Sud (France) and Cine en Construcción (Spain). See Miriam Ross, *South American Cinematic Culture: Policy, Production, Distribution and Exhibition* (Liverpool: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2010).

² 'Profile', *International Film Festival Rotterdam*, <http://www.filmfestivalrotterdam.com/professionals/hubert_bals_fund/hubert_bals_profile/> accessed 21 March 2011.

Founded in 1988, the Hubert Bals Fund (HBF), based at the International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR) in the Netherlands, is the longest running of a number of international film funds.¹ Between 1998 and 2010 the fund has supported close to nine hundred cinema projects through a number of programmes such as script development, low-budget digital production, postproduction and the distribution of finished films. The fund's remit is to provide assistance to films from developing countries and it has awarded money and resources to a number of critically acclaimed Latin American works such as *Glue* (Alexis Dos Santos, Argentina/UK, 2006), *Japón/Japan* (Carlos Reygadas, Mexico/Germany/Netherlands/Spain, 2002), *Mundo grúa/Crane World* (Pablo Trapero, Argentina, 1999) and *El custodio/The Custodian* (Rodrigo Moreno, Argentina/France/Germany/Uruguay, 2006). It states that 'although the Fund looks closely at the financial aspects of a project, the decisive factors remain its content and artistic value'.² While determinants such as artistic value are hard to measure empirically, HBF has attracted a global reputation and is well known to the filmmakers and producers who interact with the international film festival circuit. The prestige attached to the fund means that HBF is a name that not only generates publicity but can also be used by filmmakers to attract further financial support. It is also increasingly used as a brand in marketing material for completed films and its distinct logo appears next to film festival awards on posters and DVD cases as a marker of the film's significance. It is worth noting the way in which the

3 Liz Shackleton, 'Indian film's tender shoots', *Screen International*, no. 1724 (2010), p. 8.

4 <http://www.palabrasmas.org/nius/pdfs/declaracion_tres_b.pdf> accessed 21 March 2011 (my translation).

5 Mark Peranson 'First you get the power, then you get the money: two models of film festivals', *Cineaste*, vol. 33, no. 3 (2008), p. 42.

6 'Profile', *International Film Festival Rotterdam*.

fund moves beyond the role of financial benefactor or marketing tool and influences the filmmaking process to the extent that it can be understood to take up the position of film 'producer'. As an example of this process, a number of Latin American films list the fund as one of the production companies in their credits.

This 'producer' role that HBF maintains raises pertinent questions about the aims and impacts of a European fund working with developing-country filmmakers. In particular, it is important to understand the types of projects that HBF supports, the way that relationships are constructed between first- and third-world cultures, and the effect of its practices on the films that are produced. Significantly, HBF operates in an international climate where critics have noted a desire amongst distributors for what is termed 'poverty porn'. Liz Shackleton tackles this issue in relation to Indian film when she suggests that non-Bollywood films are only able to make it into the international market when they offer 'the slum-kids genre that is condemned by its critics as poverty porn'.³ As a reaction against this trend, three Latin American filmmakers, Martín Boulocq, Rodrigo Bellot and Sergio Bastani, published a manifesto in 2008 which stated they were against *pornomiseria* (porno-misery) and that their films would not exploit the political situation, poverty, or others' misfortune in order to obtain audiences.⁴ While HBF brings immeasurable benefits to filmmakers in the region, the above concerns mean that it is impossible for it to be apolitical, a point that is raised by Mark Peranson when he asks, 'Why the sudden interest in colonizing the third world through world cinema funds, which, though certainly valuable, often end up influencing the kind of film that is made?'.⁵ This essay examines the relationship between HBF and Latin American film production, although many of these points are applicable to the other filmmaking regions that the fund supports, mainly Asia and Africa.

Working within precarious economic climates and often without solid production infrastructures and resources, Latin American filmmakers rely on funds such as HBF to bring their work to completion. The money given towards script development (up to €10,000) and low-budget digital production (up to €20,000) would be considered insubstantial for many western film productions. However, it is invaluable for first-time filmmakers trying to commence work, and the support for expensive postproduction processes (conversion to 35mm film prints, Dolby sound mixes, and so on) is often the only way for a film to reach completion. From the outset this support reiterates the power imbalance at work, as the Latin American production company is aware that it comes from a background of limited capital and seeks assistance from a capital-rich benefactor. HBF's profile makes it clear that it is not supporting a specific national or regional context but an area of the world that it is defined by its economic resources. It states:

the Hubert Bals Fund is designed to bring remarkable or urgent feature films and feature-length creative documentaries by innovative and talented filmmakers from developing countries closer to completion.⁶

7 'DAC list of ODA recipients used for 2008, 2009 and 2010 flows', *OECD*, <http://www.oecd.org/document/45/0,3343,en_2649_34447_2093101_1_1_1_1,00.html> accessed 21 March 2011.

8 Geoffrey Macnab, '38th edition of Rotterdam opens with plea for Hubert Bals Fund', *Screen Daily*, 22 January 2009, <<http://www.screendaily.com/38th-international-rotterdam-film-festival-opens/4042779>> accessed 28 November 2009.

9 'Frequently Asked Questions', *International Film Festival Rotterdam*, <http://www.filmfestivalrotterdam.com/professionals/hubert_bals_fund/faq.aspx> accessed 21 March 2011.

10 See, for example, Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden, 'General introduction: what is transnational cinema?', in Ezra and Rowden (eds), *Transnational Cinema: the Film Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006) pp. 1–12; Hamid Naficy, *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media and the Politics of Place* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999); Dina Iordanova, 'Shifting politics of place and itinerary in international cinema', *Senses of Cinema*, no. 14 (2001), <<http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/14/displaced.html>> accessed 21 March 2011.

While varying and contested definitions of the 'developing world' circulate in the twenty-first century, HBF works with a specific classification that defines the criteria for filmmakers and companies wishing to seek support. To identify the nations to be considered as developing countries, the Fund makes use of the 'DAC list': the Development Assistance Committee's list of recipients of Official Development Assistance (ODA) published by the French-based Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).⁷ The majority of Latin American countries are on this list as nations in receipt of overseas aid, and thus qualify for the scheme. The extent to which the fund channels a paternalistic, one-way flow of aid to developing nations is further enhanced by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs' provision of around fifty per cent of HBF's budget. In 2009 there was fierce debate as to whether foreign aid money, traditionally employed to alleviate hunger and poverty, should be used to support cultural projects, and the future of the fund was uncertain for a number of months. However, funding was secured for future years and the Ministry committed to continuing its support of around \$800,000 annually.⁸ Furthermore, because the fund's host, the IFFR, has a global reputation, HBF frequently provides a link between Latin American cinema and the international market and, in this way, has the ability to move the project from third-world production centres to the first-world international film festival circuit. There is, then, the sense of an uneven, benefactor–beneficiary relationship at work when filmmakers engage in a working contract with the fund: filmmakers and production companies participate as both cultural producers and representatives of sites in need of first-world support.

Even when HBF-supported films are coproduced with companies from non-developing nations – and thus have a dynamic and diverse constitution – their status as part of the third world is emphatically reproduced by publicity that attests to a primary origin. Press releases from HBF and the IFFR highlight the Latin American country attached to the film, and in this way downplay transnational elements that are involved in the film's production. This emphasis on a 'developing country' identity is reconfirmed by the need for filmmakers to work explicitly within their national space. HBF states:

both the country of development and of the production should be one of the countries on the DAC-list. It is also essential that the filmmaker is a citizen of one of these countries. ... The Hubert Bals Fund support should contribute to the local film industry in one of the developing countries. Therefore in case a film is set and shot outside one of those countries, the project unfortunately cannot be accepted by the fund.⁹

While much recent film scholarship has highlighted the success of transnational filmmaking in which numerous national contexts and cultural spaces are explored on screen,¹⁰ the HBF criteria restrict the opportunities for filmmakers to work outside their national context.

- 11 Tamara Falicov, *The Cinematic Tango: Contemporary Argentine Film* (London: Wallflower, 2007), p. 115.

More often than not, the national framework that is made available on screen adheres to what international film festival audiences have come to expect of developing-world modes of being: conditions of poverty are assumed and social structures built upon limited resources are anticipated. Two examples illustrate this point: the opening sequences from the Peruvian *Dias de Santiago* (Josué Méndez, 2004) and the Argentine *Pizza, birra, faso* (Adrián Caetano and Bruno Stagnaro, 1998). Both films have a distinct national setting – Peru and Argentina, respectively – that is structured by processes of underdevelopment. It is worth mentioning that these films garnered critical acclaim in their home countries: in 2004 *Dias de Santiago* won the Critics' Award at Festival de Lima, Peru's largest film festival, and was nominated to represent Peru at the Academy Awards; *Pizza, birra, faso* won numerous awards at the Argentinean Film Critics' Association Awards in 1999 and was hailed as part of a new movement of young Argentine Filmmakers.¹¹ With regard to their status as 'Hubert Bals films', however, it is possible to see the way in which each film represents a third-world production centre and, for the international film festival spectator, confirms certain expectations of third-world culture.

Dias de Santiago begins with stark white credits on a black screen (including acknowledgment of HBF support), while the sound of fast-moving traffic, a howling wind and the occasional car horn is heard. When the first shot of the diegesis is displayed, this soundtrack matches a grainy, black-and-white, medium closeup of a female character, Andrea. She is on the edge of a dirt road, and the next shot shows the protagonist, Santiago, in front of her, looking desolate. Although there are no immediate markers to place the specific location of these shots (Lima), it is instantly apparent that the characters are standing amongst the distinctive corrugated iron and thin wooden panels that make up shanty-town dwellings across much of the urban third world. With the subsequent cut, the image changes to colour and the camera follows Santiago into his house where the sound mix is textured to allow every creak, squeak and shudder of his flimsy environment to be heard. His search through empty food cupboards literally and metaphorically indicates the material lack of capital in his life and the emotional vacuum that has been created by the social setting that surrounds him. In the following scene in his mother's kitchen, her offscreen voice further hints at his situation: she tells him that things must get better, that maybe he can work in the family shop, that he might be able to patch things up with Andrea. It is only in later scenes that the visual and aurally situated poverty is matched by a rounder synopsis of Santiago's previous life and current circumstances. He and his friends are unemployed ex-soldiers who have been let down by the Peruvian army, which abandoned them in their own country. Daily survival is often unnecessarily difficult and none of them feels at ease. When attempting to enrol at a local university, Santiago cannot get beyond the barriers presented by a bank of unresponsive computers and indifferent secretaries. Later he starts work as a taxi driver in an unlicensed cab, but there is no

meter and fares are based on a balance between what the customers are willing to pay and what he is willing to accept: a condition that makes it almost impossible for him to earn a living. The narrative ties together the sense of frustration that the socioeconomic situation brings, while the frequent depiction of poverty heightens the situation's unconquerable nature.

Similarly, *Pizza, birra, faso* follows a group of unemployed young people in Buenos Aires. They endure a parasitic lifestyle, gathering and stealing coins and spare cash for small luxuries (pizza, beer and cigarettes) while also participating in more serious crime such as muggings and holdups. The opening sequence is faster paced than *Días de Santiago* and cuts in and out of various traffic-choked street scenes. There are shots of homeless people wandering the streets; teenagers dashing amongst the cars at junctions to wash windcreens; a young woman with a baby in her arms begging from the momentarily stationary vehicles; and a number of men in wheelchairs crossing the same space. The tone of the presentation is both expository – highlighting these particular instances for a presumed audience – and humdrum – suggesting that the events are everyday and normalized in Argentine society. This mood is continued when two of the main characters, Cordobés and Pablo, hijack a taxi and steal money from its passenger. Their dismissive attitude as they talk to the passenger and the fact that their victim had the foresight to conceal some of his money suggest that car-jacking is a regular occurrence. As the sequence comes to an end, the taxi pulls into a deserted wasteland and it becomes apparent that the driver was collaborating with the hijackers. The rest of the film develops around their continual attempts to scratch out a living through both petty crime and serious, violent acts. Following the same trajectory as the character in *Días de Santiago*, they have achieved little by the film's conclusion and are unable to escape the impoverished conditions in which they exist. Although both films develop critical and engaging portraits of characters with a wide variety of concerns, particularly their relationships with lovers and family, the images and narratives concur with the perception in much of the western world that 'developing' countries are characterized by poverty, crime and violence. The Argentine scholar Gonzalo Aguilar insightfully points out the way that sites in *Pizza, birra, faso*, particularly the taxi, operate as liminal and peripheral non-places – created by the geopolitical forces of capitalism – that are on the fringes of Argentine life.¹² However, the international film festival spectator who is versed in the abundance of such sites in Latin American festival hits (*Cidade de Deus* [Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund, 2002], *Diários de motocicleta* [Walter Salles, 2004], and so on) is all too likely to presume these sites are the norm for the third-world subject.

The issues involved when films become representations of specific social contexts has been conceptualized through what has been called the 'burden of representation'.¹³ Gill Branston identifies an ongoing difficulty that arises when filmmakers or artists feel they have to stand in for their

12 Gonzalo Aguilar, *Otros mundos: Un ensayo sobre el nuevo cine argentino* (Buenos Aires: Santiagos Arcos Editor, 2006).

13 Gill Branston, *Cinema and Cultural Modernity* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000).

- 14 Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentricism* (London: Routledge, 1994).

- 15 'Project Entry', *International Film Festival Rotterdam*, <http://www.filmfestivalrotterdam.com/professionals/hubert_bals_fund/projectentry/> accessed 21 March 2011.

- 16 Shohat and Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentricism*, p. 285.

- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 286.

- 18 'Frequently Asked Questions', *International Film Festival Rotterdam*.

- 19 'Profile', *International Film Festival Rotterdam*.

community and represent it in a certain way. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam further this idea when they argue that representations of dominant groups are allowed to include difference and diversity while those of minority groups become allegorical and thus come under pressure to include positive representation.¹⁴ Coming as they do from marginal spaces – both economically and in the context of global film circulation – Latin American filmmakers become representatives of minority film culture. Although HBF does not expect the Latin American films to portray positive characters (as seen in the dubious moral attitudes of *Pizza, birra, faso*'s characters) it does expect them to represent minority or marginalized culture, something that is distinct and other from the western modes of existence in which the fund is situated. The criteria that demand filmmakers set and shoot their films within a 'developing' country only intensifies this. On its website HBF states that 'the entry should be original, authentic and rooted in the culture of the applicant's country'.¹⁵ Shohat and Stam argue that 'Third World filmmakers ... cannot assume a substratum of national power. Rather, relative powerlessness generates a constant struggle to create an elusive "authenticity" to be constructed anew with every generation'.¹⁶ Furthering this fluid aspect of national identity, they warn that 'any definition of nationality ... must be dynamic, seeing "the nation" as an evolving, imaginary construct rather than an originary essence'.¹⁷ The danger for HBF lies in any assumption that there is a fixed and stable authenticity that can be called upon. There is also the question of who it is in HBF that decides whether or not the films successfully represent an 'authentic' culture. These aspects point towards a decision-making flow initiated by the first world and accepted by the third world, a flow which characterizes many postcolonial relations.

Furthermore, it is not just that HBF encourages the film's content to be situated in a third-world context; once completed the films are circulated in a particular way. The fund states that 'the finished film will automatically be selected for the International Film Festival Rotterdam and (preferably) have its World Premiere here'.¹⁸ While this opportunity guarantees automatic access to the international film festival circuit, agreeing to screen a film at a festival means ceding the much guarded and valuable 'premiere' status and the ability to be selected for competition in other festivals. This exhibition agreement can also delay the film from reaching domestic spectators on national cinema screens as it waits to premiere at Rotterdam. *Dias de Santiago*, for example, had its first screening at the IFFR on 29 January 2004 and was exhibited at other international film festivals before reaching domestic exhibition in Peru nine months later. This circulation follows HBF's desire for films to be screened at other high-profile film festivals. Its website explains that

many international film festivals keep a close eye on completed HBF supported films and select them for their programmes. Each year, HBF supported films are screened at, among others, the Cannes, Venice, Locarno, Toronto and Pusan film festivals.¹⁹

What these factors suggest is that an international film festival spectator is the film's intended audience. They also indicate the extent to which the fund is able to determine the completed project's circulation, a role normally undertaken by the film's producer. In many ways the HBF's strength lies in its capacity to bring films and filmmakers into the international festival circuit and thus give films global mobility. This process is an important revenue stream and reputation builder; however, it does have a distinct effect on Latin American cinematic culture as it ensures that local audiences are given a belated look at their nation's cultural works. Many critics argue that Latin American audiences should have greater access to, and engagement with, cinematic works originating from their cultural context,²⁰ but an emphasis on film festivals and global distribution makes it hard for this engagement to happen, and for local cinematic culture to gain strength. The notion that the film should be suitable for film festival consumption also highlights expectations that filmmakers will produce the art cinema product that dominates festivals.

Although HBF supports Latin American distribution projects such as the Peruvian Network of Microcines²¹ or the Uruguayan Efecto Cine travelling cinema screenings,²² there is no clear link between these projects and the films that the fund helps to produce. The fund makes it apparent that it wishes to support filmmaking in the region, but on HBF's website there is little concern with distributing the HBF-funded films in Latin American countries or to 'local' audiences that could be engaged with these works. Instead, HBF notes that 'in exchange for its financial contribution the Hubert Bals Fund wishes to obtain the exclusive distribution rights of the film in the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxemburg'.²³

The films that emerge from this fund are diverse and do not always display a 'third-world' or 'developing-nation' aesthetic and content, yet there are expectations placed on them: the need to represent 'authentic' third-world culture, the desire to fit within art cinema, and the belief that they will engage with film festival audiences. These conditions filter into the films' content and are enhanced in the publicity material attached to their exhibition and distribution. The irony is that HBF situates and reiterates national and third-world significance within the cinema projects it supports, yet simultaneously restricts the access national audiences have to these works through an emphasis on film festival circulation. HBF is an undeniably useful resource for filmmakers from Latin America, but the criteria attached to the fund mean that it is hard to escape the view that third-world countries are producing cultural artefacts for their first-world benefactors. There is also the sense that the unequal relationships produced between the developed and the developing world through processes of aid and sponsorship are replicated within the practices created by HBF and the IFFR.

²⁰ For example, Octavio Getino, *Cine Iberoamericano: Los Desafíos del Nuevo Siglo* (Buenos Aires: CICCUS, 2007); Randal Johnson, 'Film policy in Latin America', in Albert Moran (ed.), *Film Policy: International, National and Regional Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 128–47; Michael Chanan, 'Algunos Preferen Proyectarse', in *Festival Internacional del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano* (ed.), *El Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano en el Mundo de Hoy* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1988), pp. 89–94.

²¹ *Grupo Chaski*, <<http://www.grupochaski.org>> accessed 21 March 2011.

²² *Efecto Cine*, <http://www.coral.com.uy/efectocine/efectocine_eng.html> accessed 21 March 2011.

²³ 'Frequently Asked Questions', *International Film Festival Rotterdam*.

Precarious cultural work: about the organization of (queer) film festivals

SKADI LOIST

- 1 See, for instance, Marijke de Valck, *Film Festivals: from European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), and the St Andrews University *Film Festival Yearbook* series. For a comprehensive bibliography on film festival research, see <www.filmfestivalresearch.org> accessed 21 March 2011.
- 2 Charles-Clemens Rüling and Jesper Strandgaard Pedersen advocate remedying this blind spot in organization and management studies, in 'Film festival research from an organizational studies perspective', *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, vol. 26, no. 3 (2010), pp. 318–23.
- 3 Kai Reichel-Heldt, *Filmfestivals in Deutschland: Zwischen kulturpolitischen Idealen und wirtschaftspolitischen Realitäten* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2007).
- 4 Volker Kufahl, 'Kai Reichel-Heldt: Filmfestivals in Deutschland. Zwischen kulturpolitischen Idealen und wirtschaftlichen Realitäten', *Rundbrief*, no. 86 (2007), <<http://www.filmbuero-nds.de/index.php/rundbrief/rundbrief-alte-ausgabe/jahrgang-2007/268-filmfestivals-in-deutschland.html>> accessed 21 March 2011.
- 5 de Valck, *Film Festivals*, p. 106.
- 6 Julian Stringer, 'Regarding film festivals' (Dissertation: Indiana University, 2003), p. 43.

Film festivals exist to showcase new films, and their role in doing this has been increasingly well documented and studied.¹ Serious study of how festivals actually operate, however, and the impact of these operations upon the final product, is relatively unexplored within the interdisciplinary field of film festival studies. Analyses of the organizational context of film festivals remain very rare, even in organization and management studies.² While Kai Reichel-Heldt speaks about festival organization in his book *Filmfestivals in Deutschland*,³ Volker Kufahl, director of the Braunschweig International Film Festival, demanded in his review of the book that festival research should also pay attention to the precarious working conditions of festival organizers (as well as cultural workers in general).⁴ I shall answer this call by looking at the festival workers and organizations behind a particular type of film event, the queer film festival, paying close attention to the ways in which the festivals are influenced by local funding politics.

Many film festival scholars assert that film festivals occupy a position of power within the film industry and film circulation, influencing the presence, visibility and dissemination of non-mainstream film. Thus festival organizers, as representatives of this 'alternative exhibition circuit',⁵ are seen as influential. Julian Stringer, for instance, refers to film festivals and their workers as 'gate-keepers',⁶ able to control access to films and film culture. This seems to assume that film festival workers occupy highly remunerated managerial positions of great influence. I want to argue, however, that this is often far from the case. Despite the (supposedly) prestigious status of film festival labour, most people

working for festivals find themselves in insecure working conditions. The festival organizations are often precarious entities themselves, struggling for funding and usually operating on a bare minimum, with only very few full-time and year-round employees, some seasonal staff, in low-pay or entry-level positions, and supported by interns and volunteers. This is true for most festivals (even at A-list events such as Berlin, Cannes and Venice). In my analysis below, I consider two local festivals in the northern German city of Hamburg, which I categorize in the groups of generalized festivals, the so-called international film festivals (IFFs), and specialized festivals, such as local queer film festivals (QFFs).

Every city that wants to compete in the global creative/cultural market and in the tourist arena, such as emerged in the 1980s, now runs an IFF or city festival,⁷ contributing to the growth of festivals beyond the limited A-list circuit. These festivals are usually funded to a large extent by municipal authorities and otherwise rely on corporate sponsorship. The IFFs often operate on minimal year-round staff and grow into larger operations only during the time directly leading up to the festival.⁸ Specialized festivals – community- or identity-based festivals such as QFFs – are mostly founded by dedicated groups who wanted to provide exhibition of a different kind of film for audiences, with either a political or representational agenda. These festivals often start as purely voluntary efforts, eventually recognized and supported by public funders and private sponsors. Since they are not initiated by a city institution for a political purpose (to promote the city's image, for example) nor do they have the substantial levels of support the IFFs enjoy, these festivals often develop different organizational structures to IFFs.

As Ragan Rhyne has shown, the QFF circuit in the USA was part of the neoliberal turn in funding politics and arranged its organization and funding strategies accordingly, by creating non-profit organizations dependent on public funding discourses and philanthropy.⁹ Similar trends are visible in Germany and elsewhere in Europe, where traditional public arts funding schemes are also dwindling in the face of neoliberal changes to funding policy, meaning that other sources have to be found. This often leads to the necessity of employing a fundraiser, and the trend towards looking for standardized funding also increases the pressure on QFFs to professionalize

Even with the creation of a 'pink market', with gay audiences targeted as distinct consumer groups in the 1990s, it is much harder for QFFs than for IFFs to attract corporate sponsorship.¹⁰ The only advantage that QFFs can offer is a historically grown direct link to the community that the festivals not only cater to but (ideally) are an active part of. As public funds have always been scarce for QFFs, the festival committees mobilize their communities for support in the form of private donations and membership. In a general climate of crumbling public arts funding, this trend of combining philanthropy with 'crowd funding' is also becoming a necessary tactic for IFFs, though one which still needs to be developed in the field of general cinephilia.

7 Thomas Elsaesser, 'Film festival networks: the new topographies of cinema in Europe', in *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), pp. 82–107.

8 For a first view on quantitative numbers of festival organizations and employment structures for festivals internationally, see Iain Lang, Simon Clode and Ann Vogel, '2006 survey of film festivals worldwide' (Unpublished study: University of Exeter, 2006).

9 Ragan Rhyne, 'Pink dollars: gay and lesbian film festivals and the economy of visibility' (Dissertation: New York University, 2007).

10 Amy Gluckman and Betsy Reed, 'The gay marketing moment', in Gluckman and Reed (eds), *Homo Economics: Capitalism, Community, and Lesbian and Gay Life* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997), pp. 3–10.

11 In Germany, for instance, an IFF worker earns approximately half of what he or she would at a film distribution major, with fewer wage rises or advancement opportunities.

12 David Hesmondhalgh, 'Cultural and creative industries', in Tony Bennett and John Frow (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Cultural Analysis* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2008), pp. 552–69; Alexandra Manske, 'Prekäre Perspektiven: Die Arbeit von Kreativen und die "Neu-Erfindung" der Arbeitsgesellschaft', conference lecture given at Konferenz des Österreichischen Bundesministeriums für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur, Vienna, 2009. <http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/18200/prekpers_manske_vortrag.pdf> accessed 21 March 2011.

13 Christina B. Hanhardt, 'Founding new beginnings: passing the torch at MIX', in Helen de Michiel (ed.), *A Closer Look: Media Arts 2001* (San Francisco, CA: National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture, 2001), pp. 39–48.

14 Basil Tsiokos, 'The challenging state of film fests today', *indieWIRE*, 20 November 2008, <http://www.indiewire.com/article/first_person_basil_tsiokos_the_challenging_state_of_film_fests_today/> accessed 21 March 2011.

Festival workers – programmers, festival directors, festival publicists – are cultural workers in a field which has no specific formalized training. Much of their work involves the year-long creation of networks with filmmakers, distributors, other programmers, sponsors, and so on. Considering the increasingly professionalized nature of work on the film festival circuit and its supposed cultural power, it is surprising that these highly specialized workers are not paid accordingly. Many festival workers earn only a modest salary compared to those in film or television, or to employees with the same amount of experience in other industries.¹¹ Festival workers are likely to hold multiple jobs in order to make a living, not only serially but also simultaneously. This is obviously true for those who only have temporary contracts (no benefits, no build-up of capital) but also for some who are on part- or full-time, year-round positions, depending on the financial situation of the festival organizations.

Thus festival workers fit perfectly the model of cultural workers with precarious living conditions. Sociologists such as David Hesmondhalgh or Alexandra Manske, working on creative and cultural industries – seen by policymakers as the new job-generators and profitable sectors – have found that workers in this field are often in precarious working conditions characterized by low pay, project-based temporary employment and a lack of career objectives, benefits or retirement plans.¹² They argue that instead of financial rewards, cultural workers in such working conditions often find other reward strategies, for instance valuing the freedom in their job – regarding time frames, mobility and being able to work for something they believe in.

This is congruent with accounts of (queer) festival organizers. In her piece on the history of the MIX NYC: New York Queer Experimental Film Festival, Christina B. Hanhardt points out that directors of the festival organization usually only manage to stay in their jobs for a few years.¹³ The low salary that MIX was able to pay meant that festival organizers had to hold down multiple jobs to support themselves, draining them of energy. She also highlights that festival directors working in these conditions were largely very young and thus more willing to work for less money in order to gain cultural capital through experience in the field. Basil Tsiokos, former festival director of NewFest: The New York LGBT Film Festival, pointed out – when leaving that position in 2008 – that being a festival director is not a full-time job, but an all-the-time job.¹⁴ Considering these accounts, it is not surprising that festival workers can only do this job for a certain amount of time. This is even more pertinent for festival organizers who are not paid at all, as is the case with the majority of smaller community and queer film festivals.

Apart from the obvious problems this creates for the individual working for a festival, this becomes a big issue for small festivals as organizations. As they cannot afford to pay, or properly pay, their highly skilled and experienced staff, festival organizations must constantly cope with them moving to better-paid jobs. Whenever a member of the volunteer festival team leaves it disrupts the fragile mechanism of the festival organization,

and it becomes more difficult to find suitable new candidates. In times of increasingly insecure working conditions across the board, it is also hard to find volunteers willing and able to devote the time and energy necessary. Even community festival organizations are pressed to professionalize more and more in order to keep up with the changes in funding, technology, and so on. Accordingly, beyond the high demands on time and energy, volunteer workers are required to work in an increasingly professionalized fashion without any direct reward, save for the pleasure of having pulled it off against the odds.

To give more specific examples, I turn to two festivals in Hamburg: Filmfest Hamburg and the Lesbisch Schwule Filmtage Hamburg | International Queer Film Festival.¹⁵ The local IFF, Filmfest Hamburg, presented its eighteenth edition between 30 September and 9 October 2010. Filmfest Hamburg was founded in 1992 when previous events organized by filmmakers (Filmfest der Filmemacher in the late 1970s, the Low Budget Film Forum in the 1980s) and cinema organizers (Hamburger Kinotage) combined to put dwindling public funds to more effective use. Filmfest Hamburg is organized as a GmbH (a limited company) and is an affiliate of the local film board, Filmförderung Hamburg Schleswig-Holstein. The festival operates on a budget of around €1 million and is supported with €650,000 by the city of Hamburg, ticket revenues, corporate and private sponsorship, and cooperation with other municipal entities such as Hamburg Marketing. This is a very modest budget for an event that runs for ten days in six venues on eleven screens, and shows 162 features and eight short films in 318 programme slots (246 public and seventy-two industry screenings), reaching an audience of approximately 38,000. Filmfest Hamburg employs five people on permanent staff and about seventy seasonal workers leading up to and during the festival.

A direct comparison is offered by the local QFF, the Lesbisch Schwule Filmtage Hamburg | International Queer Film Festival, which presented its twenty-first edition between 19 and 24 October 2010. It was founded by students with support from the local community cinema, which was in a position to apply for public funding for such events. In 1995 the festival team became independent and founded a non-profit organization (Querbild e.V.), which was also able to apply for public funding independently, and to acquire sponsorship.¹⁶ The Filmtage operates on a budget of around €150,000, and is supported with €50,000 by the city of Hamburg. Further support comes from private donations, such as the membership of the festival's Push-up Club, ticket revenues and sponsorship. The festival runs for six days in four venues on five screens, and shows forty-eight features and ninety-four shorts in sixty programme slots (all public screenings), reaching an audience of 15,000.¹⁷ Since the beginning the festival has been organized by a non-hierarchical (unpaid) core team. Currently the festival is organized by eleven volunteers and one year-round, part-time paid position, supported by about twenty year-round volunteers, and two paid interns for three months

15 Data for both festivals are based on the 2010 editions: 18th Filmfest Hamburg, 30 September–9 October 2010, <www.filmfest-hamburg.de>; 21st Lesbisch Schwule Filmtage Hamburg | International Queer Film Festival, 19–24 October 2010, <<http://www.lsf-hamburg.de>>; I wish to thank the festivals, especially Kathrin Kohlstedde and Albert Wiederspiel at Filmfest Hamburg and Ronald Behm, Christoph Reiffert and Melissa Pritchard at the Lesbisch Schwule Filmtage Hamburg for their support.

16 Michael Malert, Ulrike Zimmermann and Skadi Loist, 'Querbild e.V.: Über die Entstehung des Trägervereins der LSF und die Folgen', in Dorothee von Diepenbrock and Skadi Loist (eds), *Bildschön: 20 Jahre Lesbisch Schwule Filmtage Hamburg* (Hamburg: Männerschwarm, 2009), pp. 98–104.

17 Querbild e.V., 'Lesbisch Schwule Filmtage Hamburg/International Queer Film Festival' (Festival information brochure, 2010), <http://www.lsf-hamburg.de/presse/documents/lsf_hamburg_brochure2010.pdf> 21 March 2011.

- 18 Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg, 'Haushaltsplan 2009/2010: Einzelplan 3.3 Behörde für Kultur, Sport und Medien', 5 March 2009, <<http://www.hamburg.de/contentblob/807004/data/einzelplan33.pdf>> 21 March 2011.

leading up to the festival and about sixty volunteers helping during the festival.

When we compare these numbers it becomes quite obvious that the festivals differ considerably in size of budget, number of films, screenings and audience reach. Another very significant factor is the difference in paid positions. Not only does Filmfest Hamburg employ five permanent staff, the festival aspires to be a socially responsible entity by not relying on unpaid labour. The largest fixed budget position in a festival with staff is the cost of employees – for Filmfest Hamburg this amounts to about a third of the overall budget. The Lesbisch Schwule Filmtage Hamburg, on the other hand, was for a long time not in a financial position to even consider paid staff. In 2001 the festival made the decision to support two paid internships while retaining the historical non-hierarchical structure of the volunteer-run organizing collective. When the city's financial support increased from €25,000 to €50,000 in 2009, one year-round, part-time paid position was created to support the core team in administrative tasks and fundraising and to guarantee a permanent administrative office presence.

Taking a closer look at the funding politics as laid out in the city's budget,¹⁸ the classification of the festivals' funding is telling. The festivals' support not only differs significantly in budget size, but stems from different branches of public cultural funding. The Filmtage is one specialized festival among others (such as the short film, the children's film, and the documentary film festivals) which are funded in a subcategory of 'General Cultural Funding'. Within this group, the Filmtage had been at the lowest end of the funding scale, with €20,000, for several years, despite being the second oldest and second largest in the group. With the increase to €50,000, the Filmtage has risen to the lower midfield. In contrast, Filmfest Hamburg, as a declared city event, is funded under the heading of 'Media, Tourism, Marketing', thus being categorized as part of the media and creative industry sector.

The positioning within funding sections, as well as the amount of funding, gives a clear indication of the stakeholder interests in the festivals. Filmfest Hamburg, as a typical city festival/IFF, is not only a showcase for young cinema and independent film, allowing cinephile audiences to see films beyond the mainstream; it contributes to a culturally diverse repertoire for the urban population and functions as an image generator and tourist magnet. It is also configured as part of the media industry location Hamburg, presenting federally funded film and television awards and working closely with the Filmförderung Hamburg Schleswig-Holstein. From the city stakeholder perspective, the Lesbisch Schwule Filmtage Hamburg, on the other hand, is ranked as only one of several niche festivals, providing one facet of a diverse media repertoire. Its history of counterrepresentation and community formation is not of great interest to local cultural politics. Certainly the prolonged reservations within cultural funding politics over supporting the QFFs according to their size and reach compared to other film festivals can be

attributed to the festival's clear political agenda as part of an identity-based social movement. The increase in funding might be read as a sign that only recently has this 'political minority' community event earned a standing as a broader, cultural, cinephile event.

While I have focused here on the influence of funding – especially the difficulty of public funding – for IFFs and QFFs, this is only one aspect of the complex flow of capital through the film festival circuit. Film festivals developed in Europe primarily as sites of cultural film exhibition independent of the commercial law of box-office returns, but they are dependent on public arts funding to do this. However, the film festival circuit and arts funding policies have changed over the decades. The condition of unpaid and unstable labour, both on the IFF and community festival circuit, needs to be seen in the larger context of exploitation of cultural labour, contrary to the myth of lucrative branches of the creative industries such as advertising and IT. Baldly stated, the labour conditions of the film festival workers can be seen as a reflection of (the lack of) general appreciation of cultural work addressed to the general public vs a commodification of the arts.

In addition, as specialized festivals with a specific founding history, QFFs operate within a complex field of community politics. The lack of public funding necessitates the use of volunteer labour. In an effort to sustain their organizations and put workers in a better position, however, the festivals run into the danger of commodifying their community as a specialized niche audience. Thus, in a changing cultural landscape, QFFs need to tread carefully in an effort not to compromise community history and politics of counterrepresentation and community formation, remaining mindful of the exploitation of volunteer labour and the need to stay in touch with the evolving film festival circuit and its trends of professionalization and commercialization.

The issue of limited public funding and its impact on film festival organizations raised in this essay will remain one-dimensional if cut off from questions of the flows of capital in the larger cultural economy. Film festival researchers will need to explore these larger questions in much more detail. What are the current functions of festivals? What are the demands that different stakeholders (politicians, public funders, community, film distributors, producers, and so on), put on a festival? What exactly are the different flows of financial and cultural capital through the circuit; when does one tip over into the other; how and where is value added? Where is the money that is flowing through the circuit actually going to, if not to festival organizers or filmmakers? Who gains from this flow of capital and who should thus support the festival circuit and its workers?

From Rennes to Toronto: anatomy of a boycott

DAVID ARCHIBALD AND MITCHELL MILLER

The introduction of a new 'Cities' sidebar focusing on Tel Aviv provoked a fierce, divisive and highly public controversy at the 2009 Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF). Sponsored by the Israeli government's Brand Israel campaign, the sidebar featured ten films set in Israel's administrative capital and, while none of the films was, in itself, especially controversial, the premiss – that a major international film festival would accept money directly from an Israeli government eager to promote an alternative media image to the one associated with their nation's long and controversial involvement in Palestine – elicited an angry response from a number of public figures. Endorsing what became known as the 'Toronto Declaration', the signatories, including Frederic Jameson, Naomi Klein, Ken Loach and Slavoj Žižek, argued that the celebration of Tel Aviv was inappropriate given Israel's widely condemned actions in the Occupied Territories, particularly the invasion of Gaza in December 2008. The Declaration stated:

As members of the Canadian and international film, culture and media arts communities, we are deeply disturbed by the Toronto International Film Festival's decision to host a celebratory spotlight on Tel Aviv. We protest that TIFF, whether intentionally or not, has become complicit in the Israeli propaganda machine.¹

In response, a group of filmmakers voiced support for the festival organizers and accused their opponents of promoting both censorship and antisemitism.

¹ 'Toronto Declaration: no celebration of occupation', 9 September 2009, <<http://torontodeclaration.blogspot.com/2009/09/toronto-declaration-no-celebration-of.html>> accessed 22 March 2011.

The Toronto controversy was the latest in a string of disputes over the role of Israeli films on the 2009 international film circuit. Its genesis lay, however, in events that took place during the 2006 Israel–Lebanon War: on 4 August 2006, 123 Palestinian filmmakers and artists called on the international community to

Join us in the boycott of Israeli film festivals, Israeli public venues, and Israeli institutions supported by the government, and to end all cooperation with these cultural and artistic institutions that to date have refused to take a stand against the Occupation, the root cause for this colonial conflict.²

This relatively minor event went largely unnoticed in the international film community, although a number of filmmakers, perhaps most notably Jean-Luc Godard, have refused subsequent invitations to various Israeli film festivals as part of the boycott.³ The war in Gaza, however, gave impetus to the boycott, ensuring that it emerged as an active, if still marginal, issue in broader film culture, and film festivals have played an important role in allowing it to gather momentum. Their role as actors in this issue can be traced to the 2009 Travelling Rennes Film Festival (31 January–10 February 2009). When Israeli and Palestinian filmmakers were invited to share a platform, the Palestinian filmmakers refused, citing the continuing violence in Gaza, with Enias Mutthafar arguing ‘I can talk to [an Israeli filmmaker] about his films. But that won’t change the reality of the occupation on the ground. The reality of the Israeli–Palestinian situation is more than two people drinking coffee here.’⁴ Paris-based Palestinian filmmaker Nadine Naous concurred, criticizing joint initiatives between Israeli and Palestinian filmmakers that gave the impression that the two peoples were equal. This approach was supported by many of the Israeli filmmakers attending, including Avi Mograbi, a prominent critic of Israeli government policy.⁵ This event called into question the inclusive ethos of the liberal arts festival, the link between individuals and the states they represent on the international scene, and even whether the state of Israel and its citizens were entitled to participate in such events at all. At Rennes it was concluded that they were, but with a recognition that political and military contexts could not be transcended. The question of Israeli involvement in the international festival circuit was far from settled, however, and in May and June 2009 the debate was reignited in Edinburgh, on the eve of the city’s international film festival (EIFF).

At Edinburgh the debate begun in France was energized by political pressure groups and the intervention of a high-profile advocate who elevated the issue to international prominence. When EIFF programmed the medium-length film *Surrogate*, and received £300 from the Israeli government to fund the travel costs of its director, Tali Shalom-Ezer, the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign wrote to EIFF asking them to return the money and threatening a boycott of EIFF if they did not. Their objection was not to the attendance of Shalom-Ezer but to money from the

2 ‘Palestinian filmmakers, artists and cultural workers call for a cultural boycott of Israel’, *Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel*, 4 August 2006, <<http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=315>> accessed 22 March 2011.

3 ‘Filmmaker Godard shuns Israel after boycott call’, *Reuters.com*, 2 June 2008. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL0263966820080603>> accessed 22 March 2011.

4 ‘Movies can’t change the world, say Israeli, Palestinian filmmakers’, *Associated French Press*, 11 February 2009, <<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5h0otxky3Z0EZncjVhWdKGK689sw>> accessed 22 March 2011.

5 Ibid.

6 In 2006, EIFF returned travel funds allocated to support the attendance of Yoav Shamir to the Israeli government.

7 Loach was the figurehead of the campaign, but these letters were also signed by his regular writer, Paul Laverty, and producer, Rebecca O'Brien.

8 'Surrogate', *Edinburgh International Film Festival*, 22 May 2009, <<http://www.edfilmfest.org.uk/news/2009/05/surrogate>> accessed 22 March 2011.

9 Tali Shalom-Ezer, 'Open letter to Ken Loach', 26 May 2009, <<http://engageonline.wordpress.com/2009/05/22/>> accessed 22 March 2011.

10 Gary Sinyor, 'How dare you, Ken!', *The Independent*, 30 May 2009, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/how-dare-you-ken-1693173.html>> accessed 22 March 2011.

11 Fionnuala Halligan, 'To boycott or not', *Screen Daily* blog, 14 August 2009, <<http://www.screendaily.com/news/to-boycott-or-not/5004548.blog>> accessed 22 March 2011.

Israeli state being used to fund the festival directly.⁶ EIFF initially refused; then, after Ken Loach voiced support for the protest, the festival decided to return the money and offered to pay Shalom-Ezer's travel costs directly.⁷ EIFF chair, Ian Smith, stated, 'Clearly we didn't appreciate enough that our Festival cannot keep itself entirely detached from very serious geopolitical issues'.⁸ In the ensuing debate, Shalom-Ezer wrote an open letter to Loach expressing views consistent with those of the Israeli peace camp, a broad and loose coalition that favours scaling back operations in Gaza and questions the value of a boycott: 'In my opinion, every time a nation is subjected to a cultural boycott ... there is a tendency amongst its subjects to draw closer to more nationalistic elements; every time this happens, peace is farther away'.⁹ Shalom-Ezer emphasized the value and importance of festivals as places of cultural exchange, invoking the engagement agenda promoted by many on the Israeli Left. Loach, in response, argued that it was not possible to be neutral on the issue; a boycott was already in place and one either supports a boycott or one breaks it. Loach was noted as 'speaking for the British film community', though its collective response was otherwise rather muted. Indeed one significant voice emerged on the other side of the debate: Gary Sinyor returned the Charlie Chaplin Award that he had received for *Leon the Pig Farmer* at the 1992 EIFF, accusing those who single out Israel for 'special treatment' as antisemitic.¹⁰ Edinburgh's decision represented a victory for the boycott campaign and a defeat for the festival's PR machine; it had seemed hesitant and woolly in its initial thinking, while its attempt to bring the matter to a swift close had been derailed by Sinyor's intervention. The EIFF incident also introduced issues which would reappear in future disputes: the call to observe a boycott, arguments for the sanctity of the film festival, a potential backlash, including counteraccusations of antisemitism, and a series of threats during an 'endgame' in which festival organizers decide which way to jump.

The controversy resurfaced at the Melbourne IFF in August 2009 and was structurally similar to the EIFF dispute, with Loach again playing an instrumental role. The festival had programmed an Australian-Israeli animation, \$9.99 (Tatia Rosenthal, 2009), and the sticking point once again was the Israeli government money provided to fund the director's travel. Loach employed the same tactics that had proved so successful at Edinburgh, albeit with a higher stake, threatening this time to withdraw his latest film, *Looking for Eric*, from the Melbourne programme if the money was not refused. Melbourne's response was in marked contrast to Edinburgh's, however. The festival's artistic director, Richard Moore, was far from sympathetic, arguing bullishly that they would not 'respond to blackmail' and that 'we will not participate in a boycott against the state of Israel, just as we would not contemplate boycotting films from China or other nations involved in difficult long-standing historical disputes'.¹¹ Moore was referring to the Chinese government's decision to withdraw three films from the festival over the programming of *The 10 Conditions of Love* (Jeff Daniels, 2009), which depicts the plight of Muslim Uighurs;

12 Nic MacBean 'Film Festival "right to reject boycott"', *ABC News*, 20 July 2009, <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/07/20/2630882.htm>> accessed 22 March 2011.

13 'Director Ken Loach exits Melbourne Film Festival in protest of Israeli film funding', *The Australian*, 18 July 2009, <<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/breaking-news/director-ken-loach-exits-melbourne-film-festival-in-protest-of-israeli-funding/story-fn3dxwte-1225751688594>> accessed 22 March 2011.

14 'Report of the United Nations fact finding mission on the Gaza Conflict', *UN Human Rights Council*, <<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/specialsession/9/FactFindingMission.htm>> accessed 22 March 2011.

15 <http://www.myspace.com/state_of_israel/> accessed 22 March 2011.

16 Rommey R. Hassman, 'The Israel Brand: nation marketing under constant conflict', April 2008, <http://spirit.tau.ac.il/government/downloads/Rommy_Hassman_EngBLINT.pdf> accessed 22 March 2011.

17 Marijke de Valck, *Film Festivals: from European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), p. 38.

this gave the festival organizers important political leverage in refusing the calls for a boycott. The festival could also count upon high-profile political support; the prominent pro-Israeli Labour MP Michael Danby attempted to shift the agenda onto old narratives of resistance to British interference: 'Israelis and Australians have always had a lot in common, including contempt for the irritating British penchant for claiming cultural superiority'.¹² Moore fed into this narrative, though he avoided direct identification of Australia with Israel, instead joining the Australian media in questioning Loach's integrity and consistency – 'Mr Loach, who objects to Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and the recent Gaza intrusion, showed another of his films *It's a Free World* at last year's festival – which was also Israeli-funded'¹³ – and suggesting he had performed a volte-face. Capitalizing on the propaganda victory that (superficially) placed Loach in a similar position to the Chinese government, the organizers refused to budge and *Looking for Eric* was withdrawn from the festival. Unsupported at Melbourne, Loach now faced the possibility of being unable to participate in any festival that accepted Israeli funding. It appeared that there was also the real possibility that the boycott campaign would wither due to a lack of active support from within the filmmaking community; but just two months later the issue resurfaced, even more strongly, in North America.

At the Toronto IFF in September 2009 the controversy reached its height, with the main issue being the Tel Aviv sidebar. Although the films in the sidebar were not propagandist in nature, the decision to 'focus' on Tel Aviv, a city far from the actual conflict in the Occupied Territories, inevitably involved not 'focusing' on events elsewhere in Israel or Palestine. There was good reason, at least from an Israeli government perspective, for this: during the festival the United Nations released a report which stated that the Israeli invasion of Gaza was 'a deliberately disproportionate attack designed to punish, humiliate and terrorise a civilian population' and which suggested that Israel may have been responsible for war crimes and, even, crimes against humanity.¹⁴ This is where agents such as the Brand Israel campaign, which has been part of a concerted effort by the Israeli government to promote Israel's cultural products, can prove their worth. According to its *myspace* page, The State of Israel is a sixty-one-year-old single Taurean female, who is, amongst other things, an ardent fan of Israeli rock music.¹⁵ Run by the Consulate General of Israel in New York, the *myspace* page is just one part of the Brand Israel strategy and its attempts to legitimate the state through its cultural and artistic products. Rommey Hassman describes the trend for nations to adopt 'branding' in order to manage their image and avoid negative perceptions that affect industry, trade and investment as 'part of an ongoing process of constructing national myths, binding narratives and "imagining" the national community'.¹⁶ As Marijke de Valck notes, film festivals operate as 'sites of passage that function as the gateways to cultural legitimization';¹⁷ through the Toronto sidebar, therefore, Brand Israel was attempting to coopt the international film festival circuit as

18 Mitchell Miller, 'Voices from within the siege: Avi Mograbi and the rules of absolute engagement', *Cineaste*, vol. 32, no. 3 (2007), <<http://www.cineaste.com/articles/voices-within-the-siege.htm>> accessed 22 March 2011.

19 In *Defamation* (2009), Israeli documentarian Yoav Shamir strongly criticizes this 'anti-defamation' tactic in deflecting criticism of Israel, especially in the USA.

20 Tahel Frosh, 'Filmmakers protest uncritical view of Tel Aviv at Toronto film festival', *Haaretz*, 28 August 2009, <<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/filmmakers-protest-uncritical-view-of-tel-aviv-at-toronto-film-festival-1.282816>> accessed 22 March 2011.

21 Ibid.

22 Michael Posner, 'Cronenberg, Jewison, Oscar-winning rabbi weigh in on TIFF's Israel debate', *Globe and Mail*, 11 September 2009, <<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/arts/tiff/article1282127.ece>> accessed 22 March 2011.

23 'Prominent US rabbi denounces TIFF protest', *Toronto Star*, 10 September 2010, <<http://www.thestar.com/entertainment/tiff/article/693744>> accessed 22 March 2011.

24 Etan Vlesing, 'Filmmakers take sides over Tel Aviv spotlight', *Hollywood Reporter*, 11 September 2009, <<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/filmmakers-sides-tel-aviv-spotlight-88734>> accessed 22 March 2011.

another front in its campaign, recognizing the increased critical and artistic respectability of Israeli films as an asset to its efforts to promote the country as modern, sophisticated and democratic. Indeed, since 2006 Israeli cinema has gained currency as an important 'voice from within the siege', presenting often scathing critiques by left-leaning filmmakers.¹⁸ Films such as *Waltz with Bashir* (Ari Folman, 2008) and *Lebanon* (Samuel Maoz, 2009) appear to confirm this notion of an Israeli cinematic renaissance founded on deep self-examination and a desire for atonement, presenting Israel as a complex, diverse and self-critical society abetted by a healthy film culture. Faced with high-quality films originating in a country under boycott by pro-Palestinian campaigners, filmmakers and programmers have been divided into competing camps on the issue of how their screenings are funded: on the pro side, commentators argue for the apparent sanctity of the artistic sphere, free from the grubby world of politics, while others crudely conflate criticisms of the Israeli state with antisemitism;¹⁹ on the other side, opponents point to the importance of maintaining boycotts, accuse festivals of colonialism, and invoke the cultural boycott in the 1980s of South Africa under apartheid.

Despite the conflicting positions, the notion that Israeli cinema should not be seen appeared untenable and, noticeably, the boycott supporters shifted focus at Toronto. Klein, for instance, went out of her way to state that there was no problem with Israeli films being shown. Moreover, there was no call for Israeli government money to be returned, as was the case in Edinburgh and Melbourne; indeed the main boycott organization, the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), announced that it was not supporting a boycott of the festival. In response to the sidebar, the Canadian filmmaker John Greyson withdrew his film in protest²⁰ and was joined by others, notably the Israeli filmmaker Udi Aloni, who argued that 'Israeli directors don't have to be defensive and ask "Why are they attacking us?" but say to the Canadian directors: "We're with you on this. We don't represent [Foreign Minister Avigdor] Lieberman; we represent the opposition."²¹

As with the arguments of the MIFF artistic director, accusations of censorship were leveled by opponents of the Declaration. David Cronenberg stated that 'The attempts to stop TIFF's City to City spotlight on Tel Aviv amount to political censorship'.²² Other responses were less measured, even wildly bombastic. Film producer Robert Lantos stated that 'Their brand of political censorship is at odds with the most cherished values of Canadian society: freedom of expression and freedom of choice. Bigotry like theirs has no place at the Toronto International Film Festival',²³ while documentary filmmaker Simcha Jacobovici argued that the aims of the Declaration's supporters were 'to demonize Jews and to marginalize Israel, in order to bring about the destruction of the Jewish State. ... This is anti-Semitism in its crudest form'.²⁴

Debates on antisemitism are highly complex and beyond the capacities of this short essay, but Lantos's position, echoed in the comments of Moore and others, is worth exploring further. The naive notion that

festivals are utopian spaces with unlimited freedom of choice and freedom of expression ignores the commercial and cultural factors that shape programming. We believe that 2009 was not the right year to celebrate Tel Aviv or to demonstrate an ostrich-like indifference to the realities (cinematic and otherwise) of the region. By working in cooperation with Brand Israel, the Toronto organizers have emphatically taken sides – and, in the process, polarized opinion and drawn the lines of conflict more firmly.

The notion of the apolitical festival is founded on a dubious rationale; festivals and other arts organizations have a long history of political engagement. The Musicians' Union, for instance, was a key player in the antiapartheid movement – a campaign which many of those supporting the Israeli boycott have cited, aware of its emotive power. But should film festivals be outside of boycott politics? The justification offered by Melbourne and Toronto argues that they should, and seems blind, at least publically, to the political and programming implications of its policies; but this would imply that festivals should also have steered clear of the antiapartheid boycott campaign. If festivals do address these issues, however, who decides what gets boycotted, and what are the limits of boycotts? The signatories of the Toronto Declaration have stated that they do not object to Israeli films being screened, yet most Israeli films, including those highlighting the wrongs of occupation, are funded through state programmes. Where is the line drawn, and how can a morally consistent argument be constructed? Film festivals offer a unique space for artistic and cultural exchange where provocative artistic and political films are screened, and the controversy on the 2009 international festival circuit has highlighted that they are not immune from political events that unfold offscreen. Festival organizers have a myriad responsibilities on their shoulders; an awareness of the complexities of politics in the Middle East is, it seems, another one on the list.

Film festivals: a view from the inside

HANNAH MCGILL

My time as a regular festival attendee has been relatively brief: four years' habitual travel as artistic director of the Edinburgh International Film Festival (EIFF); five years 'on the circuit' before that as a critic and programmer. I have witnessed a period of extraordinary film festival proliferation, and throughout this time I have been in a position to experience the most solemnly highbrow and the most tawdrily decadent of the associated extremes – as well as all the plodding mundanity and intermittent minor revelations in between. I have also witnessed, within the UK context, some violent lurches in the perceived status of, and available support for, film festivals as hubs of film culture and industry: New Labour specifically committing itself in its 2005 manifesto to support of EIFF;¹ the formation of the UK Film Council's Film Festival Strategy in 2008,² and its dispersal of £4.5 million in funds to EIFF, the London Film Festival and various other significant national events; the economic crisis and the resulting dramatic drain on corporate and public support; the new coalition government's recent decision to abolish the UK Film Council, and the uncertainty left in its wake.³ I have, the whole time, been an enthusiastic cheerleader for the film festival generally and for EIFF specifically. And yet I have also wondered why there is this psychotic mushrooming of the format. Why the hordes of industry 'insiders' are self-importantly packing their sunglasses and business cards for Cannes every year when so many of the films in the competition, the side strands and the market alike will swiftly sink without trace. What the real-world value is of the repetitious onslaught of 'industry events' (heaven preserve us from another panel on digital distribution). And with film enthusiasts finding their fix in any number of new and instantaneous

¹ 'Britain: forward not back: The Labour Party manifesto 2005', p. 99, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/13_04_05_labour_manifesto.pdf> accessed 22 March 2011.

² UK Film Council, 'Massive boost for UK's film festivals', 16 June 2008, <<http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/14426>> accessed 22 March 2011.

³ UK Film Council, 'Abolition of UK Film Council', 26 July 2010 <<http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/article/16909/Abolition-of-UK-Film-Council>> accessed 22 March 2011.

ways, and funding models looking increasingly insecure, I have wondered what the future holds.

Recently, whilst attending one of the more vast and lumbering examples of the form, I went along to a pre-screening drinks reception. The filmmakers were partway through an international tour of festival launches for their film. The party, paid for by the film's prominent multinational sales company, was thinly attended; as I stood chatting to the film's director, fussily deferential waiters buzzed around us topping up our drinks and plying us with lavish shrimp-based canapes. I talked to the director about the last-days-of-the Raj feeling that increasingly pervades the film festival circuit. Was there not, we mused, a sense of mass delusion about it all – the parties, the meetings, the expense accounts? Could one not scent (beneath the aroma of seafood) the shared desperation required to sustain the myth that mass physical attendance at glitzy international premieres remains relevant in an age of multiple channels of instantaneous digital communication, miserable hopes of actual theatrical distribution for art films, hyperefficient piracy, squeezed publicity and travel budgets, layoffs in every echelon of the industry and an increasing awareness of our promiscuous overuse of fuel, paper and other resources? Surely the festival setup was hopelessly archaic; surely it could not continue to feed itself. Certainly there was more carousing to come at that particular festival, and yet it all had a ghostly feel. The following night a national film agency offered up a vast rooftop venue, a free bar and great drifted banks of sushi. The night after that a handful of the same diehards munched rare lamb at a reception for the Los Angeles office of the just-axed UK Film Council – the London-based head of which had that very day announced his decision to quit rather than remain to marshal the organization through its dying days. It was a bit like going to a wake.

It is only fair to point out that my funereal turn of mind might have had something to do with my recent decision to depart my EIFF post.⁴ Naturally I am going to argue that the festival circuit is a piece of folly just as I give up my status as one of its favoured participants; who wants a good party to go on without them? But personal circumstances aside, it is certainly striking how many annual international film events now exist, following more or less the same format (give or take variances of scale, influence and climate) and screening films from the same broad pool (there being only a certain number of truly impactful works in any given year). Strikingly, as distribution and exhibition models evolve more rapidly and confoundingly than ever, film festivals for the most part remain resolutely committed to old-school forms of presentation: they fetishize exclusivity via premiere status, and they tend to be resistant to advances in technology. For less moneyed festivals, multiple-format exhibition is a potential nightmare expense; even the richest still tend to favour 35 mm projection and to give digital projection a pretty poor showing. How long will an instant gratification-based media stand for the culture of slow, ceremonial, live, in-person unveilings that sustains the festival model? Standing in a vile, endless, sunburned queue for a Cannes

4 Ben Child, 'Edinburgh film festival chief Hannah McGill steps down', *Guardian*, 25 August 2010, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2010/aug/25/edinburgh-film-festival-hannah-mcgill>> accessed 22 March 2011.

screening not so long ago, I found myself wondering whether it would be possible to download the film on my phone from some illicit source and watch it in the time that I was waiting. If it was not quite possible then, it might well be now – though awkward attempts by many festivals to introduce online elements have not quite come off as yet; there is still an overarching sense of ‘the grandparents’ awkwardly interacting with ‘cyberspace’.

Even if you maintain that the big screen, the mass audience experience and the world premiere are still key to the flourishing of the cinematic form, the sources of private and public funding on which film festivals depend are on undeniably shaky ground in most territories. Film festivals are not, for the most part, automatically profitable, due to almighty overheads; and many of them, as publicly funded entities, are not designed to make a profit at all. EIFF is a charity; and for all its venerability and the esteem in which it is held internationally, it has a relatively minimal budget and has never had a stable source of core funding. The abolition of the UK Film Council leaves EIFF, the London Film Festival and the UK’s many other smaller film festivals without an obvious source of support or target for their lobbying. Corporate sponsorship – always indispensable for festivals, in both its cash and in-kind manifestations – takes on even greater importance during a public funding drought. But corporations are not exactly overflowing with spare cash either, and as anyone who has ever worked on a sponsored project knows, that kind of money comes with conditions attached – conditions that can end up costing more than the sponsorship is worth. EIFF once entered into an ultimately abortive conversation about title sponsorship with a company that declared it required, in exchange for its financial support of our cinema event in Edinburgh in June, that we undertake to execute entirely separate and not uncostly events outside of cinemas, outside of Edinburgh and outside of June. It was hard to see where the benefit came for us; it was a bit like being handed a fiver and instructed to spend it on a £7 gift for the giver. Even public funding, where it can be found at all, is increasingly allocated on a project basis – that is, for specific, discrete and strictly tailored programme elements – rather than for the core purpose of *putting films on in cinemas, with filmmakers there to present them*.

While images of starlets on the beach at Cannes or filmmakers swaddled in skiwear at Sundance might be central to filmgoers’ perceptions (and fantasies) of the film industry, festivals did not develop specifically as an arm of the film business. Far from being the cradle of a globalized industry, their early origins combine elements of political interest, tourist trade expansion and artistic evangelism. Film festivals notably grew out of a European film tradition focused upon art and artists, not the frankly commercial and profit-led US industry. The venerable festivals at Cannes, Venice and Berlin all settled their tourist remits and artistic projects before setting out their market stalls.

This 'market stall' element of the major festivals is itself much misunderstood. It is not always realized that the films in official selection are only one part of the picture: the sidebar sections Directors' Fortnight and Critics' Week are separately run and programmed organizations; and the business attendees are mostly there for the behemoth Marché du Film, in which screenings are bought and paid for by anyone with a film to sell. This blurring permits wily sales agents and producers to boast of having had a film 'in Cannes' whether or not it made the main selectors' grade. The Berlinale also has separately programmed sidebar sections, the Panorama and the Forum, and a vast sales arena, the European Film Market, which has been steadily growing since its inception in 1951 and now welcomes around six thousand international paying delegates.

The lack of an official market precludes neither industry activity nor the establishment of closed screenings for buyers alone. Toronto claims an 'unofficial market', while Sundance has become known for its all-night haggling sessions and multimillion-dollar deals. The latter festival's reputation as a dealmaking hotspot took hold over the indie-hungry 1990s, and has since presented the festival's organizers with a delicate credibility challenge: how to maintain its importance with key industry figures whilst downplaying the negative image of too much filthy lucre at play. Festival director John Cooper declared upon the launch of Sundance's 2010 programme that 'We weren't going to be swayed by the marketability of a film', while founder Robert Redford affirmed that 'It is not our place to decide what will be shown a year from now in theatres'. However, Cooper and his deputy Trevor Groth remain discreetly on message about the festival's industrial influence – noting that 'Sundance helped to create the industry around independent film' – and the potential for an expansion of its service to filmmakers – 'We're a big powerful brand, very useful'.⁵

By no means all festivals can claim the name recognition, or the financial heft, of Cannes, Berlin, Toronto or Sundance. Yet most of them attempt to imitate the form of those big players, and are under considerable pressure from press and funders to do so. During my time at the reins of EIFF I was often to be found weeping tears of rage as yet another newspaper had drawn attention to the troublesome 'competition' that we apparently faced from Cannes. Screening fifty-odd films to a closed industry audience, Cannes had a budget of roughly €20 million; EIFF was screening well over a hundred films to a wide public audience on a budget that wavered around the £1 million mark. Competition did not enter into it.

Oddly under-represented in the conversation about what film festivals can and do achieve are audiences and filmmakers. This might have something to do with the fact that the experience of press and industry delegates at festivals can be strikingly different from that of paying audiences or artists with work to launch. Shuffling in and out of no-frills press and industry screenings scheduled back-to-back throughout the day does not exactly replicate the thrill of a packed cinema reacting enthusiastically to a film they have chosen to see. This is an issue with

5 Brooke Barnes, 'Sundance tries to hone its artsy edge', *New York Times*, 2 December 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/03/movies/03sundance.html?_r=1> accessed 22 March 2011.

film criticism generally, but it is especially pronounced at festivals. Critics are, furthermore, often far less broadminded than audiences about work that is either experimental or flawed; the enthusiasm with which an audience will embrace newness is not always reflected by a tired and cynical press corps that remembers when it was all Fassbinder round here. On the industry side, meanwhile, there is the fierce focus upon money, which can interact awkwardly with organizations that regard their main purpose as cultural and educational. I used to have a persistent squabble with one industry supporter who was just not interested in hearing about all the weird and wonderful undiscovered and uncommercial films we had shown, the happy filmmakers we had encouraged and the audiences who had responded with glee. He wanted two things in return for his investment: for me to show him evidence of sales activity, and for influential players in London to be overheard talking about who they had met at EIFF. We were never really going to agree on the purpose of the undertaking. He believed in one kind of return on investment; I wanted another.

Having said this, there are some alternative models for festivals. In 2008, when we ‘controversially’ moved EIFF from August to June (it was controversial with about four people, I found), Mark Cousins and Tilda Swinton put on a small one-off festival in August, in Swinton’s home town of Nairn. They set up their own temporary cinema, wore pyjamas, distributed home baking and screened classic films to friends, locals and the odd London visitor. The Ballerina Ballroom Cinema of Dreams did not have brand new films, celebrity guests, press delegates or industry scouts. It was a celebration of well-loved cinema and good times: informal, joyous and resolutely rough at the edges; entirely different in intention, form and function from what we are funded and expected to do at EIFF. This did not stop a particularly obtuse London critic from deciding in print that EIFF was facing a perilous challenge to our former dates from this young pretender. (He seemed, for one thing, to be unaware that Nairn is a small hamlet more than 150 miles north of Edinburgh.) Though his criticism was based on either an utter lack of understanding or a wilful intention to misrepresent, the piece was nonetheless instructive. If the world and international premieres, shiny guests and industry kudos for which we at EIFF spent all year scrabbling were to be regarded merely as possibly inferior alternatives to an informal Highland fling centred on DVDs and cupcakes, why were we breaking our backs to adhere to the accepted formula of a film festival at all? Had the standard format really grown so tired that the Ballerina Ballroom’s deliberately childlike, dress-down-Friday approach looked like inspired forward thinking rather than delightfully anticommercial downsizing? And if so, why were most of the world’s smaller film festivals still striving to emulate the velvet-roped, red-carpeted, celeb-infested, A-list big boys?

The other new model that has distinguished itself in recent years (albeit with higher financial stakes and more fat commercial interests involved than the Ballerina Ballroom) is that of the specialist fan convention

⁶ For more information on these festivals, see <<http://www.fantasticfest.com/>> and <<http://www.comic-con.org>>.

targeted at devotees of genre cinema. With the rise in blockbuster science fiction, comic book, fantasy and supernatural franchises, the blog-scouring, figurine-collecting, tie-in-video-game-playing ‘geek’ demographic has shuffled in from the sidelines to form a significant mainstream market. Comic-Con International and Fantastic Fest have become influential players, able to talk to the *Twilight* generation in a manner unattainable in Cannes, possibly even in Sundance, and one infinitely more valuable to major studios and potential ‘breakout’ titles as a result.⁶ They do not even necessarily screen the whole film: they feed their adoring crowds on clips, trailers and celebrity sightings, and the blogosphere rallies in response.

Cupcakes and geek power: there may be lessons here for the eminent European festivals and their international imitators. Whatever new shapes establish themselves, a new generation of film consumers notoriously unimpressed by being told what to like by old people (or ‘expert curation’, as we are accustomed to calling it) seems likely to have something different in mind.

reviews

Neepta Majumdar, *Wanted Cultured Ladies Only! Female Stardom and Cinema in India, 1930s–1950s*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009, 258 pp.

PRIYADARSHINI SHANKER

Among the many happy outcomes of the recent emergence of a robust and methodologically diverse scholarship on Indian cinema, one of the most significant has been Indian cinema studies' turn to its own history. Two seminal events have enabled this important turn: the 'Indian Silent Cinema' package showcased at the Pordenone Silent Film Festival in 1994, and the publication of the first edition of Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willemen's *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema* in the same year.¹ From then on several valiant scholars, in part working as academic sleuths (the historical study has largely been circumscribed by the agonizing absence of the films themselves), have excavated the traces of films through a range of attendant historical material. Kaushik Bhaumik's 'The emergence of the Bombay film industry 1913–1936',² Manishita Dass's 'Outside the unlettered city: cinema, modernity and nation in India',³ and, most recently, Priya Jaikumar's *Cinema at the End of Empire: a Politics of Transition in Britain and India*⁴ have been foremost in sustaining a rigorous historical study of early Indian cinema.

Neepta Majumdar's groundbreaking *Wanted Cultured Ladies Only! Female Stardom and Cinema in India, 1930s–1950s* is a more than welcome addition to this cogent historiographic constellation. Majumdar chooses the most visible, albeit academically understudied, aspect of Indian cinema, 'stardom', and gives us a dynamic framework to study it as a historically situated practice. As signposted by the tongue-in-cheek title, the book maps cinema stardom on the dual axes of gender and class, innovatively interrogating the 'cultured lady' construct that emerges in early Indian cinema. Majumdar takes the 1930s as her starting point for theorizing Indian stardom, asserting that stardom becomes most consolidated with the coming of sound.⁵

¹ Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willemen (eds), *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema* (London and New Delhi: British Film Institute and Oxford University Press, 1994).

² Kaushik Bhaumik, 'The emergence of the Bombay film industry 1913–1936' (Dissertation: Oxford University, 2001).

³ Manishita Dass, 'Outside the unlettered city: cinema, modernity and nation in India' (Dissertation: Stanford University, 2004).

⁴ Priya Jaikumar, *Cinema at the End of Empire: a Politics of Transition in Britain and India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁵ It was on 14 March 1931 that India's first sound film, *Alam Ara*, was released at the Majestic Theatre in Mumbai.

In Majumdar's founding argument, early Indian cinema by the 1930s had not only imported the material technology of filmmaking from Hollywood but also the 'cultural apparatus of the Hollywood *mode* of filmmaking' (p. 1). Building upon this she mounts her central thesis: 'stardom itself may be regarded as one of the cultural technologies imported from Hollywood' (p. 3). She effectively demonstrates the paradox that underscores the assimilation of the Hollywood model of stardom within Indian popular culture. While Indian cinema stardom found in Hollywood a readily available technological model of stardom with its paraphernalia of publicity, it also made a clean break from Hollywood's ideological underpinnings in its emphasis on conspicuous material culture and lifestyles, which appeared incongruous to the project of Indian nationalism.

Majumdar neatly divides her book into two main parts, organizing it around an opposing shift in the dominant discourse on early Indian cinema stardom. The first, 'India Has No Stars', covers the period from the early 1930s to the mid 1940s, during which the predominant discussions about Indian film stardom are either defined in terms of a star absence or negatively, especially as it exists in relation to the reified machinery of Hollywood stardom. The second, 'This Stardom Racket', focuses on the postwar period from the mid 1940s to the early 1950s. The 'rhetoric of absence' dominant in the 1930s now tellingly shifts to a diametrically opposed framework, 'a rhetoric of excess' (p. 13). In both parts Majumdar deftly draws upon a wealth of subsidiary historical material – film titles, film advertisements, 'how-to' film manuals, short stories, news items, court case reports in film magazines and newspapers, and the 1927–28 Indian Cinematographic Committee hearings – demonstrating innovative possible methodologies for star analysis in the absence of the films and other extratextual material.

Chapter 1, 'The split discourse of Indian stardom', is by far the most comprehensive in scope, laying out three important foundational frameworks. First, even though the book largely engages with star discourse starting in the 1930s, Majumdar insightfully traces forms of precinematic and noncinematic fame in nineteenth-century India. In sketching out a brief history of fame she constructs a hierarchical continuity, in terms of social respectability and censorship, from the officially renowned nationalist figures to the unofficial forms of celebrity, such as those of the performing women who include urban Indian theatre actresses and courtesans. Second, she usefully discusses the early Indian film genres and their relationship to the emergence of cinematic stardom, dividing the range of film genres into 'extra-cinematic' and 'cinematic' (p. 25) and conclusively highlighting the circular relationship between the social genre and stardom. Third, Majumdar draws out an effective distinction between the 'official' discourse on Indian stars, which largely centred on profiling the face, and the 'unofficial' discourse that circulated through the shared network of public discourse: gossip, rumour and scandal. A highlight of this chapter is the author's astute analysis of the

journalistic discourse on early Indian cinema stardom, in which she reveals a somewhat symbiotic connection between journalism and the film industry, concluding that it was impossible for the journalists 'to be even marginally independent of the industry they were critiquing and reviewing' (p. 34).

The second chapter continues to substantiate the divided Indian star discourse, by now situating the public debate around cinema within the wider realm of the nationalist project. As a result of censorship and marginalization from the nationalist mainstream, early Indian cinema was never able to engage directly with the nationalist agenda. In 'The morality and machinery of stardom', Majumdar shows us that Indian cinema's disavowal as an illegitimate site was followed by the rise of a new category of film journalism that she dubs the 'What's wrong with Indian cinema?' genre, within which, subsequently, a 'discourse of improvement' emerges (p. 52). The discourse of improvement embraced a dual call: for 'textual/technological improvement' in terms of the well-oiled Hollywood machine but, more significantly, for 'moral improvement' to redeem cinema of its bad reputation through the involvement of 'the cultured lady', that is, the educated, upper-class women working as actresses.

In Chapter 3, 'Real and imagined stars', Majumdar draws upon a variety of sites in which fictitious and intertextual star identities thrive: a short story about fictional stars, a newspaper item about a legal case, and debates in film magazines between female actresses and stars. Here the book finally turns towards films analyzing stardom at two of the three leading Indian cinema studios of the 1930s – New Theaters in Calcutta and Prabhat Studios in Poona. Majumdar's discussion of stardom at New Theaters draws on an analysis of the films *Dhoop Chhaon/Sun and Shade* (Nitin Bose, 1935), *Street Singer* (Phani Majumdar, 1938) and *My Sister* (Hemchandra Chunder, 1944) to highlight the difference in the representation of male and female stardom. However, the most substantial aspect here centres on a discussion of two female stars, Durga Khote and Devika Rani, both upper-class, educated women who serve as a contrast to the author's previous focus on the largely negative image of female stars. Majumdar discusses Khote's stardom as emblemized by the Prabhat Studio star vehicle *Amar Jyoti/Immortal Flame* (V. Shantaram, 1936). Curiously but creatively, she uses another Prabhat film, *Aadmi/Man* (V. Shantaram, 1939) to discuss in a rather circuitous but reflexive manner the stardom of Devika Rani, who was the leading lady at the rival and third most dominant studio, Bombay Talkies.

The next chapter, 'Spectatorial desires and the hierarchies of stardom', sets up an oppositional structure considering two popular female stars, Sulochana (the Anglo-Indian Ruby Myers) and Fearless Nadia (the Australian Mary Ann Evans), who were placed at the high-brow and low-brow ends of the 1930s star spectrum respectively. Concentrating on white/semiwhite case studies, Majumdar maps a genre/class hierarchy of social films and stunt films. She argues that while 'Sulochana's star status, like the term *star* itself, had become an independent idea, decoupled from

the realities of specific measures. ... Fearless Nadia had no star persona outside her identification with the stunt genre, her studio Wadia movietone, and its box office successes' (pp. 96, 104). In its analysis of the very different fan responses to the two stars, this chapter also opens up questions of spectatorship in its relationship to stardom and of spectatorial desires that may be recognized as 'fandom'.

With Chapter 5, 'Monopoly, frontality and doubling in postwar Bombay cinema', the book transits to Part II, focusing on the postwar period which ushered in a new configuration of stardom catalyzed by the breakdown of the studio system. Now that the star was no longer a salaried and contracted employee with a single studio but rather a freelancer who was multiply contracted by many film producers, the economic value of stardom shifted. The earlier classificatory work based on studios/genres was now transferred to stars as, with the increase in the production of social films, genre classification became almost redundant. Mapping the shifts in the public construction of the star, Majumdar analyzes the production of gossip; the production of new star faces; the close relationship between stardom and melodramatic conventions including the aesthetics of frontality and the idea of doubling; and all the while highlights the notion of 'excess' at the centre of the stardom phenomenon.

In the penultimate chapter, 'Nargis and the double space of female desire in *Anhonee*', Majumdar revisits Nargis's star text but, unlike Rosie Thomas and Parama Roy,⁶ she explores Nargis's pre-*Mother India* star persona, taking the 1952 Hindi film *Anhonee/Impossible* (K. A. Abbas) as a case in point. Beginning with a discussion of Nargis's romantic involvement with her married costar Raj Kapoor, the author shows us how this private relationship is reconstituted publicly through Nargis's screen roles. Through a detailed textual analysis Majumdar argues for the function in *Anhonee* of the double role, that plays upon recognition and misrecognition of the star, in helping to 'repair' Nargis's offscreen identity by discerning between the 'authentic' and the 'false' star personas. Elaborating further on the gendered nature of the star system, Majumdar concludes: 'A sign of market value and a type of curriculum vitae for male stars, the double role becomes, for female stars, an essential space of metaperformance that undertakes the task of morally clarifying both generalized and particular rumors about female sexuality' (p. 172).

The concluding chapter, 'The embodied voice: song sequences and stardom in Bombay cinema', serves as an important intervention in Indian cinema star studies as it turns away from visual stardom to examine the aural, with the case of the female playback singer Lata Mangeshkar. Majumdar delineates three phases of song recording in Indian cinema: the 1930s with its stars or actors who sang their own songs; the early 1940s with its notion of 'voice-casting, or the use of a singing voice that matched both the speaking voice and the personality of the actor' (p. 185); the end of the 1950s, when the recognizability of the singing voice becomes crucial. Taking further the idea of star monopoly, this time in the domain of playback singing, Majumdar shows us how Lata's 'ordinary' and

6 Rosie Thomas, 'Sanctity and scandal: the mythologization of *Mother India*', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, vol. 11, no. 3 (1989), pp. 11–30; Parama Roy, 'Figuring *Mother India*: the case of Nargis', in *Indian Traffic: Identities in Question in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 152–73.

‘unglamorous’ star image complemented the ‘glamorous and potentially slanderous aura’ (p. 194) of the acting female star and how her ‘familiar and unchanging voice’ (p. 198) came to be the idealized female voice ruling Indian female playback singing for over half a century. Though Majumdar cursorily refers to the sibling rivalry between Lata Mangeshkar and her sister Asha Bhosle, as well as the virgin–vamp dichotomy that came to connote their respective voices, this latter issue would have merited much deeper analysis and some mention of the 1997 Sai Paranjpye film *Saaz/Music*.

Overall, *Wanted Cultured Ladies Only!* is a pivotal intervention both in the studies of early Indian cinema and of female stardom. Following scholars such as Miriam Hansen and Zhen Zhang, Majumdar relativizes and expands both the meanings of the ‘early’ in ‘early cinema’ and the ‘star’ in ‘stardom’. However, the book ends somewhat abruptly, with a hurried three-page summary. While Majumdar’s insightful discussion of Farah Khan’s recent *Om Shanti Om* (2007) serves as an elegant conclusion, bringing the star discourse up to date, her fertile scholarship signposts numerous new areas of research that really deserve to be reinforced in a proper concluding chapter.

This criticism, however, is minor given the rich value of this seminal scholarship. Participating in the last decade’s turn to feminist film history, Majumdar brilliantly demonstrates how the early Indian cinema discourse was centred on the role of the modern cultured woman in improving both Indian cinema and the Indian nation. While acknowledging the potency of the nationalist project, the book astutely locates its understanding of Indian cinema within the paradigm of modernity rather than national identity. Rigorous historical research, aided by an innovative methodology, has enabled Majumdar to mount complex and sophisticated arguments in a book that traces the contours of a very crucial juncture in Indian film history, and promises to be a landmark study.

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Amy Lawrence, *The Passion of Montgomery Clift*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010, 344 pp.

MARTIN SHINGLER

Montgomery Clift was one of postwar Hollywood’s heart-throbs, acclaimed as one of the most beautiful men of his generation until he was disfigured in 1956 by a car accident that made his subsequent screen appearances painful viewing. Infamously queer, he cut an intense, ambiguous and enigmatic figure in the US film industry from the late 1940s until his death in 1966 at the age of forty-five. His story is fascinating, dramatic, and ultimately one of disappointment. His myth is one of tragedy: a beautiful youth with a glorious career cut down by a

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tragic accident as well as by his own fatal psychological flaws. Amy Lawrence's *The Passion of Montgomery Clift* enhances his mythic reputation while simultaneously refuting key aspects of the established mythology. This is not a biography but rather a study of a career, a star image and a body of work, and an investigation into how these were created. It is written by a self-confessed fan, whose mother was also a fan back in the 1950s. As a result, this study combines the hyperbole of the fan with the kind of painstakingly detailed investigation that only a true devotee would bother to undertake. It also probes deeply into this fandom, exploring the statements of Clift's admirers in a bid to understand more fully his appeal, both in his own time and posthumously. Given an emphasis here on the religiosity of Clift's image, his association with sanctity and martyrdom (hence the 'passion' of the title), this level of devotion, bordering on worship, seems rather appropriate, despite the conventional requirement of objectivity for an academic study.

The task of writing as both fan and scholar is tricky. Here it proves to be both a help and a hindrance. On the one hand the sense of impartiality is compromised by insistent attempts to defend the star against harsh criticism from film reviewers and historians. Lawrence remains stubbornly blind to Clift's weaknesses and limitations, failing to acknowledge that even before his accident his voice had a tendency to become unattractively flat and nasal, that his expressions could sometimes appear rather wooden, and that his beauty required careful framing and lighting to prevent the camera revealing a certain oddness about his facial features due to a rather prominent nose, thin jaw and slightly crooked mouth. Nevertheless, the fan's willingness to watch and read virtually anything and everything connected with the subject pays dividends. Not only are lesser-known films brought to light, extensively scrutinized and discussed, but the original scripts for these are analyzed, highlighting key changes made in the translation from script to screen. Fanzine features and interviews, magazine articles and publicity (including European film posters) are also covered here, along with correspondence between Clift and several of his directors. Extensive archival research has uncovered numerous interesting documents that provide a rich and valuable context for understanding the actor's approach to performance and characterization as well as the star's appeal for his fans, including the ways in which some of the tensions and contradictions of his image were negotiated in promotional materials, most notably in relation to his homosexuality and his wild lifestyle, particularly his drinking. For a star with a (pseudo) saintly screen persona this clearly took some negotiating, and while Lawrence does cover this in some depth, there is still scope for development with a more thoroughgoing examination of the work of Clift's various publicists. Similarly the role of his agent (briefly mentioned here) might well make for a more extensive discussion of the difficulties of securing work for Clift in the 1950s and 1960s given his damaged appearance, his complex psychology, his idiosyncratic working methods, his alternative lifestyle and his ambiguous persona. In terms of

his casting, it may have proved useful to consider how using alternative actors in his roles would have resulted in different kinds of performance and meaning: say, for instance, if Alfred Hitchcock had cast Farley Granger, John Dall or Robert Walker in the leading role of Father Michael Logan in *I Confess* (1953). This would usefully introduce more discussion about Clift's 'type' and reveal his unique qualities as a star by comparing him with a wider category of attractive and sensitive young men in postwar Hollywood, such as Marlon Brando, Rock Hudson, Tony Curtis, Paul Newman and James Dean.

There is no doubt, however, that this book makes a valuable contribution to star studies as well as enhancing our understanding of Clift's work. For one thing it advances an understanding of *photogénie* and the pleasures of looking at actors – male actors in particular. It also provides some rich analysis of voice and the importance of voice-work (including radio and audio recordings) in a movie star's career. While the main ambition of this study is to grapple with the complexities of Clift's saintly persona, it also reveals him to be a craftsman, offering some unique insights into the working methods and conditions of (an almost major but increasingly minor) star of the Hollywood studio system. He emerges from this as a canny operator, self-aware and astute, assuming a relatively high degree of agency and autonomy, in promotional work as well as filmmaking. While he is depicted here as an actor with a high level of professionalism, he also emerges at times as uncompromising, an attitude that clearly did not make him easy to work with. To some extent this helps to work against the idea that he was a victim of fate, at the mercy of life and what it threw at him – most notably, the car crash – or of his nature and his sexuality.

Lawrence's account takes a systematic look at his career and his development as an actor and a star, covering his theatre background and training (such as his mentorship by Alfred Lunt), his collaborations with directors and fellow actors (with some mention of the role of drama coaches), revealing how different collaborators were able to help him achieve his performances. Clift is revealed to be a slow and methodical actor (but, crucially, not a Method actor) who excelled at minimalism and, therefore, at playing hesitant, traumatized or confused characters, particularly those torn apart by opposing desires or emotions, rendering them impotent, impassive, contained but about to burst. Detailed attention is paid here to performance details, providing a wealth of detailed analysis of scenes from his very first film to his last, but there is also some insightful information about his methods of preparing for and researching roles. This helps to shed new light on some well-known films, such as *Red River* (Howard Hawks, 1948), *A Place in the Sun* (George Stevens, 1951), *I Confess* and *From Here To Eternity* (Fred Zinnemann, 1953), while also raising the profile of lesser-known films, such as *The Search* (Fred Zinnemann, 1948), *The Big Lift* (George Seaton, 1950), *Indiscretion of an American Wife* (Vittorio de Sica, 1953) and *The Defector* (Raoul Lévy, 1966) – films which clearly demand wider appreciation within film

studies in terms of what they have to reveal about postwar cinema as the studio system was gradually breaking down.

Lawrence also insists upon the finer qualities of some of his post-accident movies, thereby refuting the notion that the damage done to his face in 1956 ruined his chances as an actor. Rather than simply attribute Clift's decline in the late 1950s to his impaired facial features, the author considers this as being, in part, the inevitable consequence of ageing, acknowledging that once exceptionally beautiful stars begin to show signs of age they invariably lose their popularity and struggle to secure work. She notes, for instance, that even before the accident his appearance was showing distinct signs of deterioration, including weight loss.

While it is the religious connotations of Clift's work and image that constitute the main theme of the book, its greater value lies in the detailed and intelligent assessment of an actor's labour and his repeated attempts to exert personal control over his performances and the construction of his star image in the face of a deteriorating appearance, a declining industry and an increasingly hostile and intrusive press. Although his tarnished reputation and dignity are to some extent restored by this study, enabling the professional artist to reemerge beyond the myth, there lurks a suspicion that Lawrence, as a fan, cannot come to terms with the fact that Clift, however handsome and talented, was simply unable to carry the weight of expectation. Not as beautiful as Paul Newman, not as talented as Marlon Brando and not as tragic as James Dean, Montgomery Clift proves consistently disappointing, the edge consistently taken off his stardom. Ultimately, then, it seems unfair to raise expectations further, as this book does, and make it even harder for Clift ever to fully satisfy his audience.

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Dimitris Eleftheriotis, *Cinematic Journeys: Film and Movement*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010, 224 pp.

LAURA RASCAROLI

The investigation of movement in modernity, with regard to various forms of actual or conceptual mobility as well as of mobilized perception, has long been at the pulsating heart of scholarship in the humanities and social sciences, and especially so as a result of a series of seminal shifts since the 1990s: the Lefebvrian 'spatial turn' and the new research paradigms it introduced in social and cultural theory; the deep influence of Foucauldian critical approaches; the centrality of ideas of motion, speed and shift to conceptualizations of western modernity; and the increasing relevance of matters of mobility, transit, emigration and transformation to the postmodern, postcolonial, late-capitalist, globalized world. Critical theory, anthropology, history, human geography, cultural studies and tourist studies are only some of the disciplines that have contributed to

studies in terms of what they have to reveal about postwar cinema as the studio system was gradually breaking down.

Lawrence also insists upon the finer qualities of some of his post-accident movies, thereby refuting the notion that the damage done to his face in 1956 ruined his chances as an actor. Rather than simply attribute Clift's decline in the late 1950s to his impaired facial features, the author considers this as being, in part, the inevitable consequence of ageing, acknowledging that once exceptionally beautiful stars begin to show signs of age they invariably lose their popularity and struggle to secure work. She notes, for instance, that even before the accident his appearance was showing distinct signs of deterioration, including weight loss.

While it is the religious connotations of Clift's work and image that constitute the main theme of the book, its greater value lies in the detailed and intelligent assessment of an actor's labour and his repeated attempts to exert personal control over his performances and the construction of his star image in the face of a deteriorating appearance, a declining industry and an increasingly hostile and intrusive press. Although his tarnished reputation and dignity are to some extent restored by this study, enabling the professional artist to reemerge beyond the myth, there lurks a suspicion that Lawrence, as a fan, cannot come to terms with the fact that Clift, however handsome and talented, was simply unable to carry the weight of expectation. Not as beautiful as Paul Newman, not as talented as Marlon Brando and not as tragic as James Dean, Montgomery Clift proves consistently disappointing, the edge consistently taken off his stardom. Ultimately, then, it seems unfair to raise expectations further, as this book does, and make it even harder for Clift ever to fully satisfy his audience.

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Dimitris Eleftheriotis, *Cinematic Journeys: Film and Movement*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010, 224 pp.

LAURA RASCAROLI

The investigation of movement in modernity, with regard to various forms of actual or conceptual mobility as well as of mobilized perception, has long been at the pulsating heart of scholarship in the humanities and social sciences, and especially so as a result of a series of seminal shifts since the 1990s: the Lefebvrian 'spatial turn' and the new research paradigms it introduced in social and cultural theory; the deep influence of Foucauldian critical approaches; the centrality of ideas of motion, speed and shift to conceptualizations of western modernity; and the increasing relevance of matters of mobility, transit, emigration and transformation to the postmodern, postcolonial, late-capitalist, globalized world. Critical theory, anthropology, history, human geography, cultural studies and tourist studies are only some of the disciplines that have contributed to

¹ The first issue of the international journal *Studies in Travel Writing*, for instance, was published in 1997.

² Notably, Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, *The Road Movie Book* (London: Routledge, 1997).

³ See, for instance, Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: on Vision and Modernity in the 19th Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990); Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz (eds), *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995).

shaping a debate which also received a strong impetus from Edward Said's landmark 1978 *Orientalism*. Literary studies have incorporated and expanded this body of work, as testified by the consolidation of travel literature as an area of systematic inquiry since at least the mid 1990s.¹ Simultaneously we have also witnessed an upsurge of interest in the cinema of travel, culminating with the publication at the end of the decade of the first volumes in the English language on road movies.² Film historians and theorists also turned their attention to the cinema's nineteenth-century roots, and its genealogy as a modern machine for the production of mobilized visions. The productive nature of the concept of transnationalism further accounts for the current interest of scholars in ideas of narrative, aesthetic, economic and cultural travel and border-crossing, both in and of films.

Dimitris Eleftheriotis's *Cinematic Journeys: Film and Movement* brings to this dynamic scholarly panorama, and to the debate on 'moving pictures', its own distinctive set of interests and concerns. Its three sections provide discrete but interconnected discussions that speak directly to some of the study areas outlined above, bringing their deeper connections to the surface. 'Mobile Visions', the first section of the monograph, situates the genealogy of cinematic movement in the articulation of modern subjectivity and sensibility through nineteenth-century technologies of vision, thus placing itself in the lineage of studies of the origin of cinema.³ In particular, what are arguably three salient forms of cinematic movement, especially in the context of the road movie and travel film – exploration, discovery and revelation – are found to be inscribed within precinematic media and coded in nineteenth-century emotive, perceptive and ideological registers and discourses.

Especially useful is Eleftheriotis's analysis of how influential theoretical models – the classical paradigm, suture theory, Deleuzian film theory – address questions of cinematic movement from within a series of persistent binaries: classical cinema/modern cinema; physical eye/intellectual eye; movement-image/time-image; Small Form/Large Form. His appraisal of this body of work points to the ways in which cinematic movement exceeds such formulations historically, narratively, aesthetically and affectively, thus calling for a redrawing of theoretical boundaries. Eleftheriotis aims to offer a methodological alternative, and proposes two distinct axes – activity↔inactivity and certainty↔uncertainty – as key analytical tools with which one can dialectically interrogate movement within travel cinema: 'The first axis refers to the relationship between the camera and the diegetic body of characters and the second to movement of/in the frame that explores, discovers or reveals' (p. 70).

In the second part of his study, 'Cinematic Journeys', Eleftheriotis offers textual analyses that favour the 'linguistic' dimension of filmic mobility over more decidedly cultural studies approaches by expanding his reflection to the movement of/in the frame, seen in relation to camera, body and narrative. Activity↔inactivity and certainty↔uncertainty, proposed as extensions of nineteenth-century concerns, prove particularly

useful tools in the analysis of sequences of films in which the travel has functions of exploration, discovery and revelation. Eleftheriotis's examples are drawn from non-US travel cinema, spanning canonical auteurs to more recently established directors (Jean-Luc Godard, Roberto Rossellini, Luchino Visconti, Theo Angelopoulos, Tony Gatlif, Fatih Akin), from art house to world cinema (Gyorgy Pálfi's *Hukkle* [2002], Walter Salles's *The Motorcycle Diaries* [2004], Boris Khlebnikov and Aleksei Popogrebsky's *Roads to Koktebel* [2003], Carlos Reygadas's *Japón* [2002]). Samira Makhmalbaf's *Blackboards* (1999), by contrast, is treated as an exception and is used to attract attention to the fact that some forms of travel do not have much to do with functions of exploration, discovery and revelation. In Makhmalbaf's film, perpetual movement replaces both the linear/incremental revelation of space and the circular exploration of objects and landscapes which, Eleftheriotis argues, constitute the two most characteristic types of cinematic movement, discussed throughout the book not just with regard to cognitive or narrative processes but also in terms of pleasure. Yet functions of travel that exceed those explored in Eleftheriotis's work by and large evoke a sense of displeasure and even annihilation of the self (escape, displacement, exile, diaspora, unproductive or self-destructive wandering); while the book takes care to give account of the experience of anxiety in travel, this appears to be something that is ultimately contained by most of the narratives of the films that were chosen as examples. The analysis of *Blackboards*, then, points to other possible forms and requirements of methodological and analytical engagement with movement that is resistant, or even runs contrary, to pleasure. By the same token, it prompts the question of whether other cinematic forms could be usefully explored with the same methodology as Eleftheriotis has crafted.

At issue throughout is the equation of movement and meaning. Thus Eleftheriotis, in the midst of his discussion of *Blackboards*, writes 'When does a randomly shaky frame become a "meaningful" panning shot?' (p. 154). If we take auteur and art house to be cinemas of comparatively high directorial control over the creative agency, then we may answer that movement, whether carefully planned or accidental, is in all cases meaningful, because even when random the creative agency (or the discourses that frame it as such) transforms it into an intentional element of the film's speech. It is revealing, though, to reflect on whether and how the same methodology could indeed be usefully applied to other cinematic forms, in which creative agency is understood in slightly or even radically different manners, and in which shaky cameras are the result of quite specific concerns or constraints or practices – for instance, avant-garde, documentary, amateur. How to think, then, of pictures that move even when the frame is absolutely still and little or no internal movement is provided by bodies or objects? Take the first episode of Aleksandr Sokurov's *Spiritual Voices: from the Diaries of War* (1995), a single, fixed, 38-minute shot of a frozen Russian landscape, with Sokurov's

voiceover musing on Mozart's music and life. While it is mainly the changing light here that makes the images 'move', one also wonders how voiceover and music affect our perception of the motionlessness/mobility of images.

Cinema, today more than ever, is on the move. Filmic images are no longer anchored to traditional screens but are migrating to increasingly multiple, ubiquitous, embedded, collapsible, portable and mobile monitors, terminals and displays; in the process they are transformed, while also transforming our experience of space and time, of spectatorship and reception, of stasis and movement. The cinema, which at the beginning of what turned out to be its century incorporated, recreated and expanded the moving 'view from the train window' and other cognate nineteenth-century perceptive experiences or potentialities, has in this century been confronted by radically new regimes of vision and movement, and paradigms of subjectivity and consciousness, all of which now call for a renewed critical engagement.

Well aware of the importance of looking at how films travel, Eleftheriotis devotes the last section of his book to their mobility as products in the global market. The two chapters included in 'Travelling Films' offer some of the most intriguing reflections in the volume, inviting reappraisals of 'world cinema' and of the identity of films that meet audiences which are, at first sight, utterly other. A critical analysis of the extraordinary phenomenon of the popularity of Indian films in Greece in the 1950s and 1960s is followed by a discussion of subtitles not only as material evidence that a film has travelled, but also as a constitutive element of an active spectatorial experience in which a new category of audience materializes. The 'foreign spectator', far from being sutured into the imaginary, is engaged in a semiotic act of reading which involves a movement – a constant oscillation 'between the narrative depth of the film and its surface where the subtitles reside' (p. 184). Within this perspective, the transnationalism of contemporary cinema may be viewed as generating distinctive processes of imperfect but deeply aware spectatorship, capable of activating new and fecund cultural perspectives.

Probing methodological issues, opening areas of inquiry and motivating further thinking on the ways in which films move, Eleftheriotis's book provides a rigorous, sophisticated and imaginative contribution to what is a most active research topic. The movement of films across borders, cultures and audiences; the movement activated by textual and perceptive processes; but also, and with increasing relevance, the movement of images across media and platforms; these are topics that are going to occupy researchers in film studies for some time to come. Because movement and mobility are constitutive, pivotal features of the cinema, they make for its modernity as well as for its future possibilities and developments, just as they have done at key moments in the past. It was this potential that Martin Scorsese discerned in the radical novelty of Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'eclisse* (1962), and its closing sequence in particular, in which the film with the boldest of gestures *moves away* from

its characters, leaving its narrative content behind – and, with it, the whole history of fiction film: ‘The final seven minutes of *Eclipse* suggested to us that the possibilities of the cinema were absolutely limitless’.⁴

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Alisa S. Lebow, *First Person Jewish* (Visible Evidence series). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, 224 pp.

RANJANI MAZUMDAR

The value of documentary as a critical practice and form has been the subject of intense discussion in the last two decades, represented most strikingly in the rich body of work made available by the University of Minnesota Press’s ‘Visible Evidence’ series. The relationship between documentary cinema and artistic practice has provided renewed creative energy to the debates on nonfiction film, and Alisa Lebow enters this burgeoning discourse on nonfiction theory and practice with a book that opens documentary form to questions of Jewish identity, history, memory and creativity. *First Person Jewish* is a measured account of a world of first-person experimental nonfiction cinema and its engagement with Jewish selfhood. The author embarks on a journey into twentieth-century Jewish identity not via high-profile films on the holocaust and its memory but through lesser-known nonfiction films that use Jewish stereotypes to interrogate and negotiate identity. These films are uniquely placed for their formal experimentation and for pushing the boundaries and debates that plague nonfiction cinema. *First Person Jewish* displays a healthy wariness of ‘Jewishness’ as a prescriptive cultural form and instead moves towards a deconstruction of ‘Jewishness’ as experience, as an amorphous stereotype, as a set of humorous eccentricities and as the site of traumatic history. The book is divided neatly into four chapters, each dealing with a particular version of the autobiographical form. The range of films and filmmakers remains diverse, and we also have access to a chapter on *Treyf* (1998), made by Lebow herself with her codirector Cynthia Madansky.

In the first chapter, Chantal Akerman’s film *D’Est* (1993) is situated as a return to a past that is fluid and unmoored from geographical fixity. This is a journey through history, through the landscape of Eastern Europe after 1989, in which Akerman uses the camera to produce a constellation of past and present. The fascination for incidental detail over description and the lack of narrative coherence leads Lebow to relate the film to Walter Benjamin’s approach to time and history. Akerman’s modernist aesthetic is infused by the trope of the wandering Jew and an idiosyncratic autobiographical style. Lebow takes the reader critically through the formal landscape of the film – its detours, faces and vignettes of daily life – to show us the power of this indirect autobiography, layered as it is by memory, history and the present. If Akerman’s form is indirect, then in

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the next chapter the films analyzed are more direct in their reference to the site of experience. Lebow draws on Michael Renov's formulation to term these films 'Jewish domestic ethnographies'. The family is showcased in the films not as a space where Jewishness can be easily identified, but as a kind of mystery that is sometimes imposed from the outside through reading strategies. Lebow excavates the techniques deployed by these films – such as the use of home movies in the work of Michelle Citron's *Daughter Rite* (1980) and Alan Berliner's *Nobody's Business* (1996), the use of the stereotypical Jewish mother in films like Jan Oxenberg's *Thank You and Goodnight* (1991), and the invocation of the dead in films like Abraham Ravett's *Everything's for You* (1989). We move from the playful and the ironic to the traumatic and painful. In an engaging section, Lebow stages a comparison between Ravett's and Akerman's styles to foreground critical issues about history and memory. Akerman's formal strategies treat personal memory as historical, while for Ravett history is personal, narrated in his films through a recurring obsession with his family's experience of loss.

In Chapter 3, the author turns to her own practice as a filmmaker. This autocritique focuses on *Treyf* (Yiddish for 'impure'), an autobiographical film on the queer secular Jewish identities of Alisa Lebow and Cynthia Madinsky, both residents of New York City. The film is structured like a journey into their pasts, a journey that takes them to real and imagined archives, to Jerusalem and New York, and to sites that are symbolic of heritage and violence, constantly in search of a progressive Jewish identity. Humorous, poetic and witty, *Treyf* is reflexive in its stylistic devices. This is perhaps one of the most engaging sections of the book, where the autocritique embodies both a filmmaker's and a scholar's perspective. Such a technique is not available to everyone and it is to Lebow's credit that the chapter displays, quite honestly, the struggle, the ambivalence and the doubts of the filmmakers, all of which are theoretically framed, assessed and questioned.

The final chapter of the book looks at first-person films made by lesbian and gay Jews to investigate how these dual identities play themselves out. Here Lebow is raising issues about the silences governing both sexual and Jewish identity. She is interested in the ambivalences related to one or other of these identities, staged in films that include Deborah Hoffman's *Complaints of a Dutiful Daughter* (1994), Chantal Akerman's *Chantal Akerman par Chantal Akerman* (1997), Ruth Novaczek's *Cheap Philosophy* (1992) and *Rootless Cosmopolitans* (1990) and Gregg Bordowitz's *Fast Trip, Long Drop* (1993). Lebow argues that this ambivalence is productive and generates an explosive energy. The ambivalence must be embraced, protected and respected as 'a composite response to divergent visibility strategies and pernicious pathologizing discourses that remain active, if mutable, in contemporary representational practices' (p. 148).

The great value of Lebow's book lies in the excavation of autobiography as a plural form which evokes interesting tensions in its

intersection with a public form like documentary. When these tensions collide with Jewish identity, history and memory, the result is a material force that seeks recognition as a powerful archival constellation. This, however, is a modernist archive that needs constant interrogation. Lebow's selection of films is openly experimental and appears to reiterate Hayden White's claim that only modernist experimental practice can address the experience of a post-holocaust world. The privileging of a certain kind of experimentation over other forms of testimony and documentary forms needs more theoretical reflection since the past, as we know, can surface in a variety of cultural practices. The foregrounding of modernist experimentation as the only site of value raises some issues that remain unanswered in an otherwise engaging book. Benjamin's shadow looms large throughout the text, drawing our attention to the continuing need for archives that question and reinvent our pasts. In *First Person Jewish*, floating archives of lesser-known films are usefully brought to the fore to reanimate the discussion on contemporary identity and sexuality.

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Christine Cornea (ed.), *Genre and Performance: Film and Television*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010, 215 pp.

JAMES BENNETT

Christine Cornea's collection is a useful addition to the field of film and television studies, offering a range of perspectives on the way in which genre (and medium) informs performance. Across the volume, the chapter authors provide an array of approaches to studying performance: from textual analysis of generic cycles and movements (Cynthia Baron and Richard J. Hand), to close analysis of specific scenes or episodes (Steven Peacock and Brett Mills), through to production studies (Roberta Pearson), reception studies (Cornea) and explicit engagements with genre theory (Rayna Denison). Cornea's introduction promises an interdisciplinary approach to performance, and this is best demonstrated by the variety of lenses through which genre is viewed by the contributors. There is perhaps a dominance of film studies and an absence of some other key fields in this otherwise varied collection, a matter that I shall return to at the end of this review. I have, however, concentrated on the essays focusing on television, as this is where I feel the volume's greatest intervention and productive limitations might be.

Jonathan Bignell's essay marks the collection's first foray into television, foregrounding the hybridity of television's performance, and generic and aesthetic forms by concentrating on the docudrama. Bignell's chapter is a welcome addition to the field, pointing to the importance of the genre for understanding televisual form in both aesthetic and ideological terms. He argues that the very hybridity of the docudrama

intersection with a public form like documentary. When these tensions collide with Jewish identity, history and memory, the result is a material force that seeks recognition as a powerful archival constellation. This, however, is a modernist archive that needs constant interrogation. Lebow's selection of films is openly experimental and appears to reiterate Hayden White's claim that only modernist experimental practice can address the experience of a post-holocaust world. The privileging of a certain kind of experimentation over other forms of testimony and documentary forms needs more theoretical reflection since the past, as we know, can surface in a variety of cultural practices. The foregrounding of modernist experimentation as the only site of value raises some issues that remain unanswered in an otherwise engaging book. Benjamin's shadow looms large throughout the text, drawing our attention to the continuing need for archives that question and reinvent our pasts. In *First Person Jewish*, floating archives of lesser-known films are usefully brought to the fore to reanimate the discussion on contemporary identity and sexuality.

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- 1 Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

- 2 James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988).

posits it as the most televisual of genres. It is apt, therefore, that he uses the genre to tease out some of the complexities of television performance – which is often posited as mere authenticity or naturalism – demonstrating how authenticity and ordinariness are complex performance tropes of television, linked to television’s aesthetics of immediacy and intimacy, which allow it to negotiate both public and private spaces. In so doing, Bignell places docudrama performance as part of what Lynn Spigel has called television’s ‘fantasy of antiseptic space’.¹ In turn, he argues that television’s function as ‘window and mirror’ offers particular gendered assumptions about the private and the public. In this regard, Bignell’s essay is exemplary of the kind of ideological analysis that can be achieved through close textual analysis of performance and gender.

Brett Mills similarly offers an excellent analysis of the relationships between genre, performance and ideology. Paying close attention to performance in recent television sitcom, Mills demonstrates the role that performative comedy has played in the genre. Situating this current trend against the genre’s historical origins in vaudeville and music hall, through to the classic ‘three-eyed monster’ phase, to the current trope of comedy verite, Mills moves us beyond James Naremore’s well-observed distinction between acting and performance.² Instead he positions performance as ‘comedian comedy’, which offers the central pleasure of seeing the comedian do ‘his or her thing’ largely outside of any character he or she ostensibly inhabits. Mills goes on to argue convincingly that whilst ‘the history of television sitcom has been one in which performance predominates’, comedy verite such as *The Office* has ‘undermined the distinctions between acting and performance’ (p. 144). In so doing, it promises to colonize that ‘which has traditionally been the domain of serious/tragic texts ... and has therefore undermined the distinction between various social realms of behaviour, suggesting that neither is more legitimate’ (p. 144). Like *Deadwood*’s boundary transgressions mapped by Steven Peacock, discussed below, Mills’s discussion of comedy verite and sitcom tests and troubles the boundaries of television’s generic forms through close attention to questions of performance, helpfully pointing to the aesthetic and ideological judgements that attempt to ‘uphold certain kinds of programming as more important, more worthy and more significant than others’ (p. 145).

In the final essay on television performance, Roberta Pearson mobilizes production studies to enhance our understanding of how genre informs the construction of performance in science fiction television. Drawing on interviews with the cast of *Star Trek*, Pearson explores the ‘multiple determinants of television acting’, demonstrating how ‘actors’ individual contributions ... are enabled or constrained by their colleagues as well as by the uniquely televisual conditions of production under which all creative personnel labour’ (p. 166). Pearson here makes a valuable addition to the growing field of production studies as well as analyses of television drama. In particular she points to fertile ground for explorations of the relationship between screen form and economic, creative and

production processes in television studies' turn to 'quality television'. Discussing time as one of the key determinants of television acting, she notes how boredom can be a cause for actors to leave a successful long-running serial and, while contributing to the depth, complexity and richness of the much-heralded character arcs of these long-form dramas can help 'alleviate boredom', this 'requires access to writers and producers not granted to all cast members' (p. 168). In turn, Pearson points to hierarchies of status and the ways in which production cultures – particularly between writer and actor – inform screen form, reminding us to look beyond much of television studies' focus on the writer or producer as auteur in studies of quality television.

Also concerned with questions of quality television, Steven Peacock's chapter demonstrates the possibilities of meaning that inhere in the minutiae of television performance, paying close attention to the borders and boundaries that are erected, crossed and disassembled by the intersection of language and gesture in *Deadwood*. Peacock astutely draws out how these aspects of performance attest to the density and detail in television's serial drama forms – more so because they play out over not only what Peacock describes as 'television's extended boundaries' (p. 107) but also across the vast plains of the Western genre itself. The achievements of performance here to individuate characters and create thematically consistent and engaging story arcs are, as Peacock points out, all the more deft for their negotiation of the caricature of types that populate the tundra of the US film and television Western. As James Walters's analysis of performance in *24* and *Dr Who* makes clear, television rewards our attention to the 'meanings created in the synthesis between performance style, visual composition and thematic progression', and Peacock's sustained attention to these nuances successfully defends *Deadwood*'s aesthetic achievements against previous studies of the series (p. 108).³

It is here that Peacock's essay highlights, as does the collection more widely, an important issue regarding how we address performance and genre in television studies in particular. In concluding his analysis of the achievements of *Deadwood*, Peacock feels compelled to return to film criticism – in this case Manny Farber's critique of 'White Elephant Art vs Termite Art'.⁴ Whilst film is a natural reference point for Peacock's concern with analyzing how *Deadwood* performs the Western, it is somewhat problematic that he returns to film theory in order to legitimate *Deadwood*'s aesthetic and artistic aspirations. Although the television Western is under-explored in television studies overall, something Peacock's work neatly points to, television's pretension to artistic value is of course a burgeoning field – with Peacock himself an important contributor to these debates.

In the book's bringing together of film and television performance there is, to some extent, a tendency for essays on television to frame their responses through film theory and approaches. For example, Gwendolyn Audrey Foster's essays on *The Colbert Report* draw on notions from film

3 James Walters, 'Repeat viewings: television analysis in the DVD age', in James Bennett and Tom Brown, (eds), *Film and Television After DVD* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 69.

4 Manny Farber, *Negative Space: Manny Farber on the Movies* (London: Studio Vista, 1971).

- 5 See, for example: on news, Patricia Holland, 'When a woman reads the news', in Helen Baehr and Gillian Dyer (eds), *Boxed in: Women and Television* (London: Pandora Press, 1987), and Margaret Morse, 'The television news personality and credibility: reflections on the news in transition', in Tania Modleski (ed.), *Studies in Entertainment* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986); on comedy, Frank Krutnik and Steve Neale, *Popular Film and Television Comedy* (London: Routledge, 1990), and Andy Medhurst, *A National Joke: Popular Comedy and English Cultural Identities* (London: Routledge, 2007); on playing oneself, Andy Medhurst, 'Every wart and pustule: Gilbert Harding and television stardom', in John Corner (ed.), *Popular Television in Britain: Studies in Cultural History* (London: British Film Institute, 1991), pp. 59-75, and Karen Lury, 'Television performance: being acting and "corpsing"', *New Formations*, no. 26 (1995), pp. 114-31.
- 6 See, for example, David Cannadine (ed.), *History and the Media* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), and Helen Wheatley (ed.), *Re-Viewing Television History: Critical Issues in Television Historiography* (London: IB Tauris, 2007).

theory concerning the drag act, eschewing work on performance in television news, comedy or 'being oneself'.⁵ Similarly, Bignell's otherwise excellent essay might have benefited from greater engagement with debates in television history form (again, a field to which the author is an important contributor).⁶ This is not to criticize individual authors or the collection per se; it is, after all, a book on film *and* television performance. Rather, whilst greater engagement with the growing body of work on television performance would have been welcome, it points to the need for more work in this area.

Relatedly, it is interesting that celebrity studies is, on the whole, eschewed in this collection: only Cornea herself, discussing the relationship between the actorly self and (re)-animation, and Rayna Denison, examining the star image of Sharhrukh Khan in the context of generic hybridity in Bollywood, draw explicitly on celebrity studies paradigms to consider performance or 'the self'. Whilst Richard Dyer's work is referenced throughout, the importance of stardom in performance can hardly be over-emphasized when, as Cornea herself demonstrates, even the disappearance or reanimation of a particular actor in a film can actually work to 'accentuate signature styles associated with each star identity' (p. 161).

Despite these quibbles, the collection does largely succeed in its aim of offering interdisciplinary approaches to performance. At the same time, essays highlight the importance of genre in constructing the meaning of not only performance but a wide range of other political, social, aesthetic and ideological factors that are reframed by paying close attention to performance itself. That the collection points to work still to be done in this area only attests to its value in opening up new ways of thinking about film and television.

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Contributors

David Archibald teaches Film Studies at the University of Glasgow. He has written about film festivals for numerous publications including the *Financial Times* and *Film International*. His monograph on the Spanish Civil War in cinema is forthcoming in 2011.

James Bennett is Senior Lecturer in Television Studies at Royal Holloway, University of London. He is author of *Television Personalities: Stardom and the Small Screen* (2010) and editor, with Niki Strange, of *Television as Digital Media* (forthcoming 2011). He also edits the 'Celebrity Forum' section of *Celebrity Studies Journal*.

Felicia Chan is RCUK Fellow in Film, Media and Transnational Cultures with the Research Institute of Cosmopolitan Cultures and the Centre for Screen Studies at the University of Manchester. Her work has appeared in various journals, and in Chris Berry (ed.), *Chinese Films in Focus* (2003). She is coeditor of *Genre in Asian Film and Television* (forthcoming, 2011).

Pansy Duncan is a PhD candidate in the Department of Film, Television and Media at the University of Auckland. Situating emotion in the context of postmodern film aesthetics and theory, her thesis looks at borderline emotions: knowingness, boredom, bewilderment and fascination.

Jonathan Foltz is a doctoral candidate in the English Department at Princeton University. He is currently completing a dissertation, 'Modernism and the narrative cultures of film', which examines the reception of cinema in the work of Virginia Woolf, Roger Fry, H.D. and Henry Green.

Skadi Loist is Junior Researcher at the Institute for Media and Communications at the University of Hamburg. She is on the board of the Hamburg International Queer Film Festival. Her PhD project analyzes queer film festivals in the USA and Germany/Austria. With Marijke de Valck she cofounded the Film Festival Research Network.

Hannah McGill was the artistic director of the Edinburgh International Film Festival (2006–10). Former film critic at *The Herald*, she is a regular contributor to *Sight and Sound* and BBC's *Newsnight Review*, and a guest lecturer in Film Studies at the University of Glasgow.

Ranjani Mazumdar is Associate Professor of Cinema Studies at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She is author of *Bombay Cinema: an Archive of the City* (2007), and is currently working on 1960s Bombay cinema.

Mitchell Miller is an artist, critic and writer. He is editor of *The Drouth: Scotland's Literary Quarterly*, and teaches Film Studies part-time at the University of Glasgow.

Anand Pandian is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Johns Hopkins University. He has published widely on questions of modernity, selfhood and media in India, including *Crooked Stalks: Cultivating Virtue in South India* (2009). His current ethnographic book project focuses on the production practices of Tamil popular filmmakers.

Alastair Phillips is Reader in Film Studies at the University of Warwick. His recent publications include *Rififi: a French Film Guide* (2009) and, with Julian Stringer, *Japanese Cinema: Texts and Contexts* (2007). He is currently coediting, with Ginette Vincendeau, *The Blackwell Companion to Jean Renoir* (forthcoming, 2012).

Laura Rascaroli is Senior Lecturer in Film Studies at University College Cork, Ireland. She is author of *Crossing New Europe: Postmodern Travel and the European Road Movie* (2006) and *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film* (2009), and coeditor, with John David Rhodes, of *Antonioni: Centenary Essays* (forthcoming, 2011).

Miriam Ross is Lecturer in Film at Victoria University of Wellington. She is author of *South American Cinematic Culture: Policy, Production, Distribution and Exhibition* (2010).

Priyadarshini Shanker is a PhD (ABD) candidate in the Department of Cinema Studies at New York University, and teaches at NYU and Columbia University. She has published in *Hitchcock Annual* and in Lalitha Gopalan (ed.), *The Cinema of India* (2009). Her dissertation maps the emergence and rise of Bollywood as a distinct zone of cultural production.

Martin Shingler is Senior Lecturer in Radio and Film Studies at the University of Sunderland, and coauthor, with John Mercer, of *Melodrama: Genre, Style and Sensibility* (2004). He is currently writing a book on star studies and coediting a series of books on film stars for Palgrave/BFI.

Helen Wheatley is Associate Professor in Film and Television Studies at the University of Warwick. She is author of *Gothic Television* (2006) and editor of *Re-viewing Television History: Critical Issues in Television Historiography* (2007). She is coinvestigator on the AHRC-funded project, 'A history of television for women in Britain, 1947–89'.

Notes to Contributors

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1. Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: the Imaginary Signifier*, trans. Celia Britton et al. (London: Macmillan, 1982).
2. Ginette Vincendeau, 'Melodramatic realism: on some French women's films in the 1930s', *Screen*, vol. 30, no. 3 (1989), pp. 51–65.
3. Monika Treut, 'Female misbehaviour', in Laura Pietropaolo and Ada Testaferri (eds), *Feminisms in the Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 106–21.

References to *films* in both notes and main text should include full title, and in the case of non-English language films original release title should precede US and/or British release title, followed by director and release date in round brackets: *A bout de souffle/Breathless* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1960)

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The Big Sleep (Howard Hawks, Warner Bros, US, 1945)

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